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THE OLDEST ENGLISH EPIC

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THE OLDEST ENGLISH EPIC

BEOWULF, FINNSBURG, WALDERE, DEOR, WIDSITH, AND THE GERMAN HILDEBRAND

TRANSLATED IN THE ORIGINAL METRES
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

BY

FRANCIS B. GUMMERE

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To

GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE

KEENEST OF CRITICS, KINDEST OF FRIENDS

PREFACE

Old English epic in the specific sense is that ancient and wholly heathen narrative poetry which Englishmen brought from their continental home and handed down by the agency of professional singers. The material thus accumulated either kept its original form of the short lay, fit for chant or recitation at a banquet, full of immediate effects, often dramatic and always vigorous, or else it was worked over into longer shape, into more leisurely considered and more leisurely appreciated poems. This second class is represented by *Beowulf*, the sole survivor in complete form of all the West-Germanic epic. *Waldere*, of which two brief fragments remain, seems also to have been an epic poem; like *Beowulf*, it has been adapted both in matter and in manner to the point of view of a monastery scriptorium. *Finnsburg*, on the other hand, so far as its brief and fragmentary form allows such a judgment, has the appearance of a lay. Its nervous, fiery verses rush on without comment or moral; and it agrees with the description of a lay which the court minstrel of Hrothgar sings before a festal throng, and of which the poet of *Beowulf* gives a summary. Not English at all, but closely related to English traditions of heroic verse, and the sole rescued specimen of all its kind in the old German language, is *Hildebrand*, evidently a lay. By adding this to the English material, one has

the entire salvage from oldest narrative poetry of the West-Germanic peoples in mass. Finally, there are two lays or poems purporting to describe at first hand the life of these old minstrels, who either sang in permanent and well-rewarded office for their king, or else wandered from court to court and tasted the bounty of many chieftains. These two poems, moreover, contain many references to persons and stories of Germanic heroic legends that appear afterward in the second growth of epic, in the Scandinavian poems and sagas, in the cycle of the *Nibelungen*, *Gudrun*, and the rest. Such is the total rescue from oldest English epic that fate has allowed. It deserves to be read in its full extent by the modern English reader; and it is now presented to him for the first time in its bulk, and in a form which approximates as closely as possible to the original.

The translator is under great obligations to Professor Walter Morris Hart, of the University of California, not only for his generous aid in reading the proof-sheets of this book, but also for the substantial help afforded by his admirable study of *Ballad and Epic*.

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THE OLDEST ENGLISH EPIC

CHAPTER I

BEOWULF

I

THE manuscript[1] is written in West-Saxon of the tenth century, with some Kentish peculiarities; it is evidently based on successive copies of an original in either Northumbrian or Mercian, which probably belonged to the seventh century.[2] Two scribes made this copy. One wrote to verse 1939; the other, who seems to have contributed those Kentish forms, finished the poem. There is some attempt to mark the verses, and a few long syllables are indicated; but the general appearance is of prose.

The original epic seems to have been composed by a single author,[3] not for chant or recitation to the accompaniment of a harp, but for reading, as a "book."

[1] Codex Vitellius, A, xv, British Museum; injured by fire, but still legible in most places, and, for *Beowulf*, complete.

[2] There is no positive evidence for any date of origins. All critics place it before the ninth century. The eighth brought monastic corruption to Northumbria; while the seventh, described by Beda, with its austerity of morals, its gentleness, its tolerance, its close touch with milder forms of heathenism, matches admirably the controlling mood of the epic.

[3] This attitude towards the so-called "Homeric question" in *Beowulf* must be explained and defended elsewhere, though a few hints are given in the following pages.

Libraries were then forming in England, and so edifying a poem as this could well find its place in them. Of course, the number of persons who heard the manuscript read aloud would be in vast excess of those who learned its contents through the eye. The poet may or may not have been a minstrel in early life; in any case he had turned bookman. He was familiar to some extent with the monastic learning of his day, but was at no great distance from old heathen points of view; and while his Christianity is undoubted, he probably lived under the influence of that "confessional neutrality," which ten Brink assumed for the special instance, and which historians record for sundry places and times. Above all, the poet knew ancient epic lays, dealing with Beowulf's adventures, which were sung in the old home of the Angles, and in Frisia, and were carried over to England; out of these he took his material, retaining their form, style, and rhythmic structure, many of their phrases, their conventional descriptions, and perhaps for some passages their actual language. *Finnsburg* and *Hildebrand* give one an approximate idea of these older lays, which were property of the professional minstrel, the gleeman or *scop*. This *scop*, or "maker," is always mentioned by the epic poet with respect. His business was to recite or chant to the music of a harp the lays of bygone generations before king or chieftain in court or hall, precisely as our epic describes the scene.[1] He must also on occasion compose, "put together" in the literal sense, a lay about recent happenings, often carrying it abroad from court to court as the news of the day.[2] Out of such old lays of Beowulf's

[1] See especially *B.*, 1066 ff., and the two poems *Widsith* and *Deor*.

[2] See *B.*, 149 ff. For extemporizing, see the classical passage, *B.*, 867 ff.

adventures, our poet selected, combined, and retold a complete story from his own point of view. Comment, reflection, and a certain heightening of effect, are his peculiar work, along with a dash of sentiment and an elegiac tone such as one feels one should not meet in a *Finnsburg*, even if the whole of that lay were preserved. Attempts to prove that the poem was translated or paraphrased from a Scandinavian original have been utterly unsuccessful. Quite obsolete, too, as in the case of Homer, is the idea that *Beowulf* is primitive and "popular" poetry. Its art is highly developed; its material has been sifted through many versions and forms.

The characters of this epic of *Beowulf* are all continental Germanic. The scene of action for the first adventure is in Denmark; and Hrothgar's hall was probably at a place now called Leire, not far from the fiord of Roeskilde. Where the fight with the dragon took place and Beowulf came to his death, depends on the opinion which one holds in regard to the home of the hero. There are two theories; certainty, despite the recent proclamation of it, is out of the question. Beowulf is said to belong to the "Geatas"; and the majority of scholars[1] hold that these Geatas were a tribe living in the southern part of Sweden. But some powerful voices have been raised for the Geatas as Jutes, who lived in what is now Jutland. In either case, Angles and Frisians, and whatever peoples were grouped about the Elbe, the Weser, and the Ems, would note with great interest, and hold long in memory, an expedition of Geatas which should proceed to the lower Rhine and there find defeat at the hands of a Frankish

[1] Including Henrik Schück, whose essay on the Geatas (Upsala, 1907) is thought by some reviewers to be final in its conclusions.

prince. Such an expedition actually occurred; it is the historical foundation not, to be sure, of the events of the epic, but of the existence of its characters. It is mentioned several times in the poem,[1] and is also matter of sober chronicle; its date is in the second decade of the sixth century. Gregory of Tours, in his *History of the Franks*,[2] says that Chochilaicus, king of the Danes, — in another and later story, say of the seventh century, this chieftain is called king of the "Getæ," — invaded Holland in viking fashion, took a good store of plunder, and got it later on his boats; but he was fought and killed by Theudebert, son of the Frankish king, his booty was recaptured, and many prisoners were taken. It is etymologically certain that Chochilaicus is the Hygelac of our epic, uncle to Beowulf; and there is no reason to doubt the tradition that the hero himself, though not mentioned by the chronicle, was with his kinsman and chieftain, and escaped after the defeat by a masterful piece of swimming. The poem tells this;[1] and its exaggeration in loading Beowulf with thirty suits of armor is only proof that something of the sort took place. Legend is always false and always true. History invents facts; but legend can only invent or transpose details; and there is sure to be something real within the field of the glass which legend holds up to one's eyes, let the distortions be as they may be. Surely some stirring epic lays were sung about fight and fall and escape; but in this phase of Beowulf's career our poet was not interested. He mentions many feuds of Franks, Frisians, Langobards, of Danes, Geats, Swedes;

[1] See *B.*, 1202, 2201, 2355, 2913; and the notes to these passages.
[2] III, 3. *Dani, cum rege suo nomine Chochilaico*, . . . he begins.
[3] See *B.*, 2359 f.

and he gives a summary of the lay about one of these feuds which a gleeman sang to Hrothgar's court. But these, too, were outside of his main interest.

His interest in Beowulf seems to have centred in the hero's struggles with those uncanny and demonic, but not highly supernatural powers, who either dwell by moor-lands and under dismal waters, or else, in the well-known form of a dragon, haunt old barrows of the dead and fly at midnight with fiery trail through the air. Undoubtedly one is here on the border-land of myth. But in the actual poem the border is not crossed. Whatever the remote connection of Beowulf the hero with Beowa the god, whatever this god may have in him of the old Ingævonic deity whom men worshipped by North Sea and Baltic as god of fertility and peace and trade, whatever echo of myths about a destroying monster of invading ocean tides and storms may linger in the story of Grendel and his horrible mother, nothing of the sort comes out of the shadow of conjecture into the light of fact. To the poet of the epic its hero is a man, and the monsters are such as folk then believed to haunt sea and lake and moor. Hrothgar's people who say they have seen the uncanny pair[1] speak just as real rustics would speak about ghosts and strange monsters which they had actually encountered. In both cases one is dealing with folk-lore and not with mythology. When these crude superstitions are developed by priest and poet along polytheistic lines, and in large relations of time and space, myth is the result. But the actual epic of Beowulf knows nothing of this process; and there is no need to regard Grendel or his mother as backed by the artillery of doom, to regard Beowulf as the

[1] *B.*, 1345 ff.

embodiment of heaven's extreme power and good-will. The poet even rationalizes his folk-lore.[1] Though there are traces of "another story," traces which would doubtless lead to outright myth, the epic is told in terms of human achievement. Though its hero, in this record of adventure, neither fights other heroes nor leads armies, and though, like many celebrated champions of vast strength, he is not at ease with ordinary weapons, nevertheless he is for the poet that same Beowulf who always fought in the van with trusty blade,[2] despatched the mother of Grendel with a sword, and killed Dæghrefn, — presumably the slayer of Hygelac, — in the fatal combat by the lower Rhine. Yet Dæghrefn, one is abruptly told, as Beowulf boasts of all his good blade has done and all it is yet to do, was not slain by the sword, but "his bones were broken by brawny gripe."

The inconsistency of this passage, taken with that reference elsewhere to the hero's inability to use a sword, is supposed by a few scholars to prove different origins for different portions of the actual epic. It really proves that the poet combined Beowulf of the actual "war record" with Beowulf of the struggles against monsters and dragons, the hero with thirty men's strength in his grasp. Every reader of popular tales knows that in these struggles swords are rarely good for much. Like Samson, Beowulf depends on his own might; but that might must approach the miraculous. Different formulas, if one may use the term, are applied to different phases of the same hero's adventures. For example, Beowulf is evidently in one

[1] Accounting for Grendel's invulnerability, *B.*, 984–990, somewhat as in the case of the dragon (2699) which had to be pierced beneath, where it had no scales.

[2] *B.*, 2490.

formula a bright, capable, precocious boy ; his grandfather loves him as an own child; he performs, to his great renown, a prodigious feat of swimming when he is a mere lad.[1] On the other hand, conforming to the type of many popular tales, he is described[2] as "slack" in youth, a shiftless, clumsy, disregarded encumbrance, whom the king will not honor and whom the retainers despise : but the inevitable change comes, the hero bursts into full glory. Here is another formula. If it is not easy for modern criticism to fit these stories with one another and with their subject, let it be remembered how hard was the task which confronted the poet in his constructive problem. Unity of character was no object of the old lays ; vigorous narrative of action was all they attempted. Yet this poet strove manfully to make Beowulf a consistent character throughout the epic; and in view of the divergence of the different stories told of all heroes, one is inclined to think that the Northumbrian bard did his work fairly well. On the large plan he works out his design with evident intention of harmony. Parts match parts ; scenes answer to scenes; the pattern is plain. In detail, to be sure, he makes many a blunder. Grendel "in his folly" despises weapons; yet it is explained that he is "safe" against them all, — and where is the folly? Beowulf, in another place, will take no mean advantage by bearing arms against one who knows nothing of their use![3] Grendel, again, terrible as he is to the Danes, never has a shred of chance with Beowulf, who is victor from the start; yet with the mother, who is expressly described as far less formidable than her offspring, the hero is hard put to it, and nearly overcome. He trusts now in his sword, which fails. Is this the

[1] *B.*, 2432 ; 535. [2] *B.*, 2187. [3] See *B.*, 433 f. and 801 ff. ; and 677 ff.

Beowulf whose irresistible and crushing grasp made Grendel sing the wild song of death? No, but it is the Beowulf who had such a thrilling adventure with the "she-wolf of the seas," that it could on no account be left out of the list. Adventures in the old cycles were not made to modern order; and it was something of a triumph to combine the meagre account of the killing of Grendel, described as almost a bagatelle for the hero, with the far more detailed and interesting account of the desperate struggle under water. Probably this hulking, swamp-haunting Grendel was originally no relative whatever of the vicious but indomitable old "she-wolf," and their adventures were absolutely distinct. The poet, in one of the more modern passages, tells of their kinship and describes their home; and it is not unlikely that he sought by this method of combination, which gave at the same time scope to his poetic fancy, to bring about unity in structure and conformity of general treatment. This assumption, moreover, would credit him with the description of Hrothgar's court, the events there, the scene in which riders chant Beowulf's praise and a minstrel makes the lay about him, and, on the whole, a very handsome portion of the epic at large. The poet's invention cannot be denied.

—In short, the best way to regard all the inconsistencies in the epic account of Beowulf is neither to split him into equal parts of hero and god, nor yet to divide him among many poets, but simply to think of him as a hero who not only has his own fairly authentic story, but has attracted a whole cycle of more or less alien adventures into his sphere. There is ample analogy in the round of popular tales. Many a champion now fights in fierce

battle, and now goes to exterminate a monster. Norse stories tell of heroes whose adventures are so close to Beowulf's as to rouse suspicion of copy or common origin. In the present state of knowledge it is best to let the adventures pass as adventures, and to renounce more curious search. As was said, agnosticism is here the only safe attitude towards myth. Beowulf's swimming-match with Breca has been euhemerized into the mere killing of sea-beasts, and etherialized into a myth of the culture-god who taught a grateful folk how to navigate the stormy seas. Beowulf must be accepted as the hero of a tale. His capital adventures are the sort of thing which heroes, real or fictitious, are always assumed to do. They kill monsters, giants, dragons. "It is their nature to," as the old verse ran. Such feats are expected from a kindly and beneficent hero; and such a hero the real Beowulf may well have been. If he reminded folk of a god Beowa, so much the better. He really rendered good service to some northern king, though he is no glorified rat-catcher. Perhaps he did destroy noxious beasts as other heroes had done. His last fight, if one can accept the dragon, is a most humanly told and everyday sort of tale, though it is quite another story compared with the former adventures.

The lays about all these adventures our poet heard and knew and loved. He knew also the lore of devils and hell's fiends, who vex the righteous man, and nevertheless can be met and conquered by a Christian champion. He could not make a Christian out of Beowulf, but he describes the hero in terms of one of the converted Anglian kings and surrounds him with the amenities of the new courts. Of Grendel he made a hell-fiend outright,

and assigned him by superfluous genealogy to the tribe of Cain. The wise saws and ancient instances may be colored by a new theology; but they derived from the old wisdom poetry in which Germanic minds had long delighted.

We have thus come fairly close to an understanding of the poet's conception of the characters in his epic and his treatment of them. We must now look at the characters themselves.

II

The persons[1] of the epic fall into evident groups. Apart from the prelude, which glorifies the Danish royal house, and repeats the pretty myth of Scyld the Sheaf-Child, we have the actual family and companions of Hrothgar, king of the Danes. He himself is son of Healfdene — that is, a king whose mother was not of the Danish folk — and brother to Heorogar and Halga. The three brothers, as so often in Germanic families, have names in the same rime; one thinks of Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot in the *Nibelungen*. Heorogar, the oldest, was king before Hrothgar, and had a son Heoroweard, but for some reason did not leave favorite armor to him. Halga was probably father of Hrothulf, — as in the Norse account, Helgi was father of Hrolf Kraki, the famous hero. Saxo tells the story of him, and his betrayal by a relative, who probably answers to Heoroweard of our epic. In *Widsith* one is told more of Hrothgar and this nephew Hrothulf. Together they

[1] To the scholars who have studied these characters and solved sundry problems of relationship and parallel mention, it is impossible to render adequate thanks and praise. Much is still left unsolved; and some of the problems are insoluble.

successfully repelled an attack by Ingeld, Hrothgar's son-in-law, on their own land. Hrothgar's own sons are Hrethric and Hrothmund; and they seem to be considerably younger than their cousin Hrothulf, judging by the queen's appeal [1] to the latter, and her assumption that he would treat the boys honorably and kindly if their father, the king, should die. This queen of Hrothgar — who first breaks the list of aspirated names — is Wealhtheow ("foreign maid"), a dignified and charming woman so far as she appears in the epic. She and the king have a daughter, who made a favorable impression on the affable Beowulf; [2] he heard men in hall call her Freawaru as she went about, like her mother, pouring the ale. She was betrothed to Ingeld, son of Froda, the Heathobard king; but the visitor forecasts no real good from this alliance. — Such was Hrothgar's family. Besides unnamed officers and attendants, three important men at his court were Æschere, his beloved comrade and chancellor, whom Grendel's mother destroys, a warrior of renown, rich in counsel, elder brother to Yrmenlaf; further, Wulfgar, a prince of the Wendlas, chamberlain and marshal of the court; and Unferth, the orator or spokesman, who is a puzzle in regard to his exact vocation and rank. He undertakes to "haze" Beowulf at the first banquet, and is badly beaten in the battle of words. He is a warrior, and lends Beowulf his sword; but dark things are hinted about his character and perhaps about his reputation for courage. Yet he is a favorite of Hrothgar, sits "at his feet," — on a bench just below him, — and could be regarded as a kind of jester and merrymaker, were not his position so evidently above that class. "Orator"

[1] *B.*, 1180. [2] *B.*, 2020.

must do. He had the gift of tongues; but there is no hint that he made verses.

Another quite subordinate group of Danes may be noted here as involved in the episode of Finn. Hnæf, son of Hoc, brother to Hildeburh, is said by Widsith to be ruler of the Hocings. His sister Hildeburh is married to Finn the Frisian king, son of Folcwalda. When Hnæf is killed, Hengest is leader of the Danes; later he too is slain. Guthlaf and Oslaf are Danish warriors. — One Danish king, moreover, is mentioned as antitype for Beowulf. This is Heremod, who resembles both Lotherus of Saxo, and Hermod of the *Hyndluljoth* in Norse poetic tradition.

The other main group is that of the house of Hygelac, and his nephew Beowulf. Swerting, a king of the Geats, had a son Hrethel, who had three sons, — one notes again the rime and the aspirated names, — Herebeald, Hæthcyn, and Hygelac. By a tragic accident, Hæthcyn shot and killed his elder brother; he is killed himself in leading his people against the Swedes; and Hygelac then becomes king. Hygelac falls on the historic raid, leaving a son Heardred, who is killed by Onela the Swede. Then Beowulf comes to the throne. Professor Gering conjectures the year 521 for this accession. Hygelac's queen is Hygd, daughter of Hæreth; when her husband falls, she offers the crown to Beowulf, but he prefers to act as regent for Heardred. Hygd is described in terms of praise. Hygelac, moreover, has a daughter whom he gives to Eofor in reward for killing Ongentheow, the Swedish king. Eofor and Wulf ("Boar" and "Wolf") are sons of Wonred. As for the hero, he is a Wægmunding, son of Ecgtheow of that tribe; but his mother is only daughter

of King Hrethel the Geat, who adopts the boy at seven years of age and brings him up. Ecgtheow, meanwhile, has killed one Heatholaf, a Wylfing, and is not allowed to stay with his wife's people, but takes refuge with Hrothgar the Dane. The boy, of course, remains with Hrethel. As sister's son to Hygelac, a very close relationship among the old Germans, "by some accounted nearer than actual sonship," Beowulf becomes virtually a Geat. Nevertheless, when he dies he has but one kinsman left, the faithful Wiglaf, "last of the Wægmundings." Beowulf's own story [1] is mainly reminiscence of feuds in which he took part. He tells Hrothgar's court of his swimming adventure along with a friend of his youth, Breca, son of Beanstan and prince of the Brondings. He also names to Hygelac a favorite thane who was killed by Grendel, Hondscio, whose man-price is paid by the Danish king. Beowulf leaves a widow,[2] but no children. His "last words" are very impressive.[3]

One would like to have the lays which dealt with feud between Geat and Swede ; but all one has in the epic is allusion or summary.[4] Ongentheow, a capable king, has the poet's good-will in spite of these hostile relations. He kills Hæthcyn, but is killed by Eofor as deputy of Hygelac. Ongentheow's son Onela becomes king of Swedes ; another son, Ohthere, has himself two sons, Eanmund and Eadgils (all these names rime by the initial vowels), who rebel against their uncle, King Onela, and are banished, taking refuge with Heardred the Geat. Onela invades Geatland and kills Heardred, but, it would seem, allows Beowulf to

[1] *B.*, 2425 ff. [2] The reading is generally accepted : see *B.*, 3150.

[3] See passages beginning *B.*, 2729 ; 2794 ; 2813.

[4] Many of these names and stories appear, more or less disguised, in Norse traditions.

succeed to the throne undisturbed. Later, Beowulf supports Eadgils in an expedition of revenge; the nephew kills Onela and succeeds to the Swedish throne.

Other persons are mentioned incidentally. Dæghrefn, champion of the Hugas, or Franks, probably killed Hygelac, and was killed by Beowulf on the famous raid. Far more enticing are the dim traditions of Offa the old Anglian king, son of Garmund, and father of Eomer. Offa still was known by later generations, and by his kin beyond the German Ocean, as the best warrior and wage-giver who ever reigned in the sea-girt lands of the north.[1] Something of the Offa legend besides mere reminiscence and comparison has surely slipped into the epic; but it is hard to follow in detail. A wider range of legend, touching the heroic times which have given so many names and stories to Germanic verse, includes Eormanric the Goth, typical tyrant; Hama, also a Goth, who bore away the mysterious Brosings' necklace; and that famous pair, Sigemund and Fitela, the Wælsings, of whom the Volsung-saga afterwards told so full a tale.[2]

Biblical names are few; our poet was no pedant, and carried his learning with ease. Probably the burden was light. Cain and Abel decorate Grendel's family tree. "God" is used mainly in the Christian sense, even when divine dealings with a heathen people are in point. "Hel" is the place,[3] not the goddess. But Weland, god of the forge, is named as maker of Beowulf's armor; and if the conception of Wyrd, or Fate, is now and then a philosophical projection of the heathen goddess, it is more often a personal name. Devils, fiends, monsters, dragons, occur in indiscriminate execration of the Christian and

[1] See *Widsith*, 38 ff. [2] See *B.*, 1201, 1198, 879. [3] *B.*, 852.

heathen vocabulary. "Eotens" are giants, but also enemies, also devils; in complimentary use, also Frisians.

Geography is not very clearly visualized, but it was conceived. The Frisians, Franks, Finns, place themselves. The Heathobards are either the Langobards, or a small tribe on the Elbe. The Danes are called Bright-Danes, Spear-Danes, and Ring-Danes; also, and quite indifferently,[1] North, South, East, and West Danes. The Geats are called Weather or Storm Geats, War Geats, and Sea Geats. Of their place names, Eagle Cliff and Whale's Cliff are mentioned, and "Hreosnabeorh." Ravenswood is probably to be sought in Swedish lands.

III

The poet used the old lays for facts and events, but he must have taken many of the descriptions as well as most of the comment into his own hand. The conditions of culture in the epic are fairly English; though the very raid on which Hygelac lost his life testifies to commerce, however predatory, on the part of continental Germanic tribes with the civilized section of Europe, and to their acquaintance with things of civilized life. The actual Beowulf surely knew wine, beds, ornaments and gold of all sorts, armor and weapons of the best; these were objects of plunder. So, perhaps, even with tapestry. But the construction of the hall Heorot is certainly helped by *ex post facto* information of the poet, and so are the paved street, the mosaic floor, trappings of war-horses, musical instruments. Above all, the courtesy, refinement, reticence, and self-control not only of the main characters, but of chamberlains, watchmen, and the like, must be a reflec-

[1] *B.*, 383, 392.

tion of English life at one of the Christianized courts. Weapons and armor are perhaps traditional in the main. The corselet or coat of mail was very carefully made, and required a year of one man's time to forge it and to join its twenty thousand small rings, — the "ring-mail" of the poem.[1] Shields are perpetually mentioned, and were mainly of wood, strengthened by leather and even by metal bands. The sword is so valued as to have name and pedigree. All this could be traditional; and so could be the use of runes or letters for inscriptions on the hilt or blade of a sword. The poet still held to old belief in the magic effects of such runes, as well as in the efficacy of spells and bannings generally. One must not too closely regard this attitude of the bard, his puerility and pettiness of tone. Even Chaucer sins in the same fashion, if it be a sin to breathe the intellectual and artistic air of one's own day, and to reveal this habit in one's work.

IV

Metre and style of the epic are traditional; the art of the minstrel was unchanged by the poet. His rhythm holds to that four-stressed verse with initial rimes which dominates all Anglo-Saxon poetry and rests on the common Germanic tradition. Its essential principles, as observed in the present translation, may be stated as follows. The single verse consists of two obvious half-verses, each of which has two stressed syllables; and these stressed syllables of the verse must be also accented syllables of the word, — as in modern, but not as in classical metres. The first stressed syllable of the second half — third of the whole — is the "rime-giver." With

[1] J. R. Clark Hall, *Beowulf*, p. 179, quoting Sophus Müller.

it must rime one and may rime both of the two preceding stressed syllables. The fourth stressed syllable, however, — second in the second half-verse, — must not rime with the third, or rime-giving syllable, but may rime with that one of the other two which happens not to match the rime-giver. For example, in the usual form, —

"Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,"

"foes" rimes with no stressed syllable, as both first and second match the rime-giving third; but in —

"There laid they down their darling lord,"

a cross-rime prevails. It must be remembered that all vowels rime with one another: so, —

"ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge."

By observing these rules in translation, one may count on a rhythmic movement which fairly represents the old verse. The translation, to be sure, must alternate stressed and unstressed syllables with more "regularity" than can be found in the original, which followed rules of detail now impossible to observe. The preponderance of falling rhythm cannot always be maintained, nor can the translator always keep his rimed verse-stresses on the words to which they belong in the old metrical system. But these are not vital objections. Nothing meets the reader in this old rhythm with which he is not familiar in modern poetry; he recognizes initial rime as an ornamental factor in verse, though he is not wont to find it the controlling factor.

This same statement holds true of the style of the old epic. Modern poetry has occasional variant repetition; but repetition is not the controlling factor, the

inevitable cross-pattern, as it is in old poetic diction. Modern poetry makes ample use of metaphor; but the practical necessity of "kennings" in alternate statement or epithet is no longer known. Considering now these old factors of poetic style for themselves, one finds that variant repetition is woven into the very stuff of epic; it is closely allied, as in Hebrew poetry, with the rhythmic principle. But our epic verse is continuous, and has no stanzaic balance, no limit, such as exists in Hebrew; so that in oldest English poetry the unrestrained process of variant repetition piles epithet on epithet and phrase on phrase. In *Beowulf* there have been counted a hundred different appellations for the hero, and fifty-six for King Hrothgar.[1] Occasionally there is a "couplet" which resembles the Hebrew:

> "To him the stateliest spake in answer;
> The warriors' leader his word-hoard unlocked."

On this variant repetition great force is bestowed by the use of metaphor, particularly by "kennings." A kenning is where one speaks of the sea as "the whale's road" or "the gannet's bath," — as if the phrase were a "token" of the thing. So in the couplet just quoted, "spake in answer" is literal; its variant, "unlocked the word-hoard," is metaphorical; and "word-hoard" is kenning for "thoughts" or "intention." When the reader grows accustomed to this cross-pattern of repetition, — and he has no quarrel with it in its somewhat different guise in the Psalms, — he will appreciate its importance as a factor in the old poetry, and he will not be unduly baffled

[1] Illustrations of variant repetition, taken almost at random, are *B.*, 120–125, 2794 f., and 3110 ff. The "couplet" is *B.*, 258 f.

by its persistence.[1] One can easily get rid of it, or suppress it to the vanishing point, by a prose translation; but that is not only to renounce real knowledge of the poetical ways of the epic, but to get an utterly false idea of it.

Other features of the style of the epic call for little or no comment. Litotes, or emphasis by understatement, — as when the best of warriors is called "not the worst," — is a prime favorite with the poet of *Beowulf;* it can be found on almost every page. The simile occurs a few times, to be sure, but it is an exotic; and any long simile may be set down as copied from learned sources.

V

No greater mistake exists than to suppose that the rhythm and style of these early English poems cannot be rendered adequately in modern English speech. It is not a question of classical hexameters, but of English verse old and new. As a practical problem *solvitur ambulando;* one can point to the fact that all the accredited German translations of *Beowulf* and *Finnsburg*, with one exception, have been made in the verse of the original;[2] and this exception is a failure just so far as it fails to give account of verse and style. As a matter of theory nothing is more absurd than to contend that the old system of verse was an art suddenly and utterly lost in the abyss of the Norman Conquest. To be sure, its exact prosody could not survive changes in linguistic structure; compromises with

[1] Now and then it is puzzling, as when it seems to make two persons out of one: see *B.*, 688 f.; 1866 f.; 2129 f.

[2] Heyne's is in blank verse. The latest of the German translations, that of Professor Gering, gives the four-stress verse with admirable effect, retains the rime, and in itself refutes the charge of the prosemen.

foreign forms of verse took it into new ways, and sent it, say as "tumbling verse," down to our own time, justified by such a line as Browning's

"Seethed in fat and suppled in flame" . . .

yet in its own person it passed the stage of the conquest, kept its vigor, suffered few notable changes, and appears as a popular and effective verse, some six centuries from the date of the original *Beowulf*, in the *Piers Plowman* poems. Englishmen of that day had ears to hear "rum-ram-ruf" in no mocking spirit, as well as to greet the harmonious flow of Chaucer's pentameter. That very pentameter, too, reveals from time to time in the actual four-stress tendency, and, — though not so often, — in its initial rimes, a hint of the old rhythmic structure :

"Ther shyveren shaftës upon sheeldës thikke" . . .

In short, if the two systems — old four-stressed initial-rimed and new pentameter — could appeal to the same hearers, and if Chaucer is now the delight for lovers of verse that he was in his own day, there should be no difficulty for modern ears to allow the dual presence. William Morris employed something akin to the old rhythm in parts of his charming *Love is Enough:*

"For as lone as thou liest in a land that we see not,
When the world loseth thee, what is left for its losing?"

Yet, apart from its haphazard and unregulated initial rimes, this rhythm is far too swift in its pace for the old verse. Professor J. L. Hall used it for his translation of *Beowulf* very effectively; but though he curbed it here and there, it is still too rapid, and the initial rimes are not fully carried out. The translation of *Beowulf* by Morris and Wyatt cannot be called an improvement on

Professor Hall's translation, for their vocabulary is archaic or invented to an intolerable degree, and the rimes are not followed on any fixed principle. However, the present writer's business lies not at all with the criticism of verse-translations of *Beowulf;* his affair consists in presenting to modern readers a rendering, faithful as he can make it, of the entire body of oldest traditional narrative poetry in English, as handed down by the minstrel, or as worked over into longer epic form.

BEOWULF

PRELUDE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE DANISH HOUSE

Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!
Oft Scyld the Scefing [1] from squadroned foes,
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,
awing the earls.[2] Since erst he lay
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,
till before him the folk, both far and near,
who house by the whale-path,[3] heard his mandate,
gave him gifts: a good king he!
To him an heir was afterward born,
a son in his halls, whom heaven [4] sent
to favor the folk, feeling their woe

[1] English historians knew the story or myth of this Scyld ("Shield"), who as a helpless child drifts ashore in an oarless boat. The boat is filled with weapons, but a "sheaf" of grain serves as pillow for the little sleeper; and hence the people call him Shield the Sheaf-Child. They make him their king. He ruled, so William of Malmesbury says, "where Heithebi stands, once called Slaswic." The term "Sheaf-Child" came to be misunderstood as "Child of Sheaf," and Scyld was furnished with a father, Scef or Sceaf.

[2] An 'earl" was the freeman, the warrior in a chosen band; though not yet indicating specific rank, the word carried a general idea of nobility.

[3] Kenning for "sea." Tribes across the water, say in southern Sweden, or westward of the Danish lands in Zealand, became tributary to Scyld.

[4] Literally, "God."

that erst they had lacked an earl for leader
so long a while ; the Lord endowed him,
the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown.
Famed was this Beowulf :[1] far flew the boast of him,
son of Scyld, in the Scandian lands.
So[2] becomes it a youth[3] to quit him well
with his father's friends, by fee and gift,
that to aid him, agéd, in after days,
come warriors willing, should war draw nigh,
liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds
shall an earl have honor in every clan.
Forth he fared at the fated moment,
sturdy Scyld to the shelter of God.[4]
Then they bore him over to ocean's billow,
loving clansmen, as late he charged them,
while wielded words the winsome Scyld,
the leader belovéd who long had ruled. . . .
In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel,
ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge :
there laid they down their darling lord

[1] Not, of course, Beowulf the Geat, hero of the epic. Genealogies of Anglo-Saxon kings name this son of Scyld as Beaw, Beo, Bedwig, Beadwig, Beowinus, etc., all shorter forms or corruptions of a common original name. The name Beowulf may mean "Wolf-of-the-Croft" (Gering), but its etymology is uncertain.

[2] Sc. "as Scyld did." Beowulf's coming fame is mentioned, so to speak, as part of Scyld's assets, and the whole passage is praise of the "pious founder" of the Danish line.

[3] The Exeter Maxims, vv. 14 f., say :

> Let the atheling young by his honest comrades
> be emboldened to battle and breaking of rings, —

i.e. liberal gifts to his clansmen.

[4] To heaven, the other world. Various metaphors are used for death ; *e.g.* "he chose the other light." See also v. 2469.

on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings,[1]
by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure
fetched from far was freighted with him.
No ship have I known so nobly dight
with weapons of war and weeds of battle,[2]
with breastplate and blade : on his bosom lay
a heapéd hoard that hence should go
far o'er the flood with him floating away.
No less[3] these loaded the lordly gifts,
thanes' huge treasure, than those had done
who in former time forth had sent him
sole on the seas, a suckling child.
High o'er his head they hoist the standard,
a gold-wove banner ; let billows take him,
gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits,
mournful their mood. No man is able
to say in sooth, no son of the halls,
no hero 'neath heaven, — who harbored that freight![4]

[1] Kenning for king or chieftain of a *comitatus :* he breaks off gold from the spiral rings — often worn on the arm — and so rewards his followers. In Ælfric's famous Colloquy, early in the eleventh century, the huntsman says he sometimes gets gift of a horse or an arm-ring from his king.

[2] Professor Garnett's rendering.

[3] The poet's favorite figure of litotes or understatement. He means that the treasure which they sent out with the dead king far exceeded what came with him in the boat that brought him, a helpless child, to their shores.

[4] While the reader should guard against putting into these effective lines sentiment and suggestion which they do not really contain, he should compare this close with the close of Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur.* The classical passage for ship-burial among the old Germans is the description of Balder's funeral in the prose Edda. On the "greatest of all ships" was laid the corpse of the god ; and a balefire was made there ; and rings, and costly trappings, and Balder's own horse, were consumed along with the body.

I

Now Beowulf bode in the burg of the Scyldings,
leader belovéd, and long he ruled
in fame with all folk, since his father had gone
away from the world, till awoke an heir,
haughty Healfdene, who held through life,
sage and sturdy, the Scyldings glad.[1]
Then, one after one, there woke to him,
to the chieftain of clansmen, children four:
Heorogar, then Hrothgar, then Halga brave;
and I heard that —— was ——'s queen,[2]
the Heathoscylfing's helpmate dear.
To Hrothgar[3] was given such glory of war,
such honor of combat, that all his kin
obeyed him gladly till great grew his band
of youthful comrades. It came in his mind
to bid his henchmen a hall uprear,
a master mead-house, mightier far
than ever was seen by the sons of earth,
and within it, then, to old and young
he would all allot that the Lord had sent him,
save only the land[4] and the lives of his men.

[1] If *glæde* is adverb, read:

Haughty Healfdene: hardy and wise,
though old, he graciously governed the Scyldings.

The name "Halfdane" means that his mother was foreign born.

[2] "I heard," the epic formula, often has a merely conjunctive force, as here, when it may be rendered, as Klaeber notes, "and further." — The name of the daughter is lost; no suggestion so far has enough weight to gain preference. The "Battle-Scylfings" are the race known in Scandinavian annals as Ynglings, a Swedish people. Kluge, using the Saga of Hrolf Kraki, reads: "Sigeneow was Sæwela's queen."

[3] Heorogar's reign, noted below, vv. 465, 2158, is here passed over by the poet, who wishes to come at once to the story.

[4] Literally, "folk's share." Gering translates "all that God had given him along with his land and his people."

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Wide, I heard, was the work commanded,
for many a tribe this mid-earth round,
to fashion the folkstead. It fell, as he ordered,
in rapid achievement that ready it stood there,
of halls the noblest: Heorot[1] he named it
whose message had might in many a land.
Not reckless of promise, the rings he dealt,
treasure at banquet: there towered the hall,
high, gabled wide, the hot surge waiting
of furious flame.[2] Nor far was that day
when father and son-in-law stood in feud
for warfare and hatred that woke again.[3]

[1] That is, "The Hart," or "The Stag," so called from decorations in the gables that resembled the antlers of a deer. This hall has been carefully described in a pamphlet by Heyne. The building was rectangular, with opposite doors — mainly west and east — and a hearth in the middle of the single room. A row of pillars down each side, at some distance from the walls, made a space which was raised a little above the main floor, and was furnished with two rows of seats. On one side, usually south, was the high-seat, midway between the doors. Opposite this, on the other raised space, was another seat of honor. At the banquet soon to be described, Hrothgar sat in the south or chief high-seat, and Beowulf opposite to him. The scene for a flyting (see below, v. 499) was thus very effectively set. Planks on trestles — the "board" of later English literature — formed the tables just in front of the long rows of seats, and were taken away after banquets, when the retainers were ready to stretch themselves out for sleep on the benches. Some additional comment will be found in the excellent notes in Mr. Clark Hall's translation of *Beowulf*, p. 174.

[2] Fire was the usual end of these halls. See v. 781, below. One thinks of the splendid scene at the end of the *Nibelungen*, of the *Nialssaga*, of Saxo's story of Amlethus, and many a less famous instance.

[3] It is to be supposed that all hearers of this poem knew how Hrothgar's hall was burnt, — perhaps in the unsuccessful attack made on him by his son-in-law Ingeld. See vv. 2020 ff., and the note, where Beowulf tells of an old feud which this marriage is to set aside, and hints that the trouble will not be cured even by such a remedy. He too thinks that "warfare and hatred will wake again." — See also *Widsith*, vv. 45 ff.

With envy and anger an evil spirit
endured the dole in his dark abode,
that he heard each day the din of revel
high in the hall: there harps rang out,
clear song of the singer. He sang who knew[1]
tales of the early time of man,
how the Almighty made the earth,
fairest fields enfolded by water,
set, triumphant, sun and moon
for a light to lighten the land-dwellers,
and braided bright the breast of earth
with limbs and leaves, made life for all
of mortal beings that breathe and move.
So lived the clansmen in cheer and revel
a winsome life, till one began
to fashion evils, that fiend of hell.
Grendel this monster grim was called,
march-riever[2] mighty, in moorland living,[3]
in fen and fastness; fief of the giants
the hapless wight a while had kept
since the Creator his exile doomed.
On kin of Cain was the killing avenged
by sovran God for slaughtered Abel.

[1] A skilled minstrel. The Danes are heathens, as one is told presently; but this lay of beginnings is taken from Genesis.

[2] A disturber of the border, one who sallies from his haunt in the fen and roams over the country near by. This probably pagan nuisance is now furnished with biblical credentials as a fiend or devil in good standing, so that all Christian Englishmen might read about him. "Grendel" may mean one who grinds and crushes.

[3] See notes below on the notion of a water-hell. "Hell and the lower world," says Bugge, "were connected to some extent in the popular mind with deep or boundless morasses." *Home of the Eddic Poems*, tr. Schofield, p. lxxiv.

Ill fared his feud,[1] and far was he driven,
for the slaughter's sake, from sight of men.
Of Cain awoke all that woful breed,
Etins[2] and elves and evil-spirits,
as well as the giants that warred with God
weary while: but their wage was paid them!

II

Went he forth to find at fall of night
that haughty house, and heed wherever
the Ring-Danes, outrevelled, to rest had gone.
Found within it the atheling band
asleep after feasting and fearless of sorrow,
of human hardship. Unhallowed wight,
grim and greedy, he grasped betimes,
wrathful, reckless, from resting-places,
thirty[3] of the thanes, and thence he rushed
fain of his fell spoil, faring homeward,
laden with slaughter, his lair to seek.
Then at the dawning, as day was breaking,
the might of Grendel to men was known;
then after wassail was wail uplifted,
loud moan in the morn. The mighty chief,

[1] Cain's.

[2] The *eoten*, Norse *jotun*, or giant, survives in the English ballad-title, *Hind Etin*. The "giants" of v. 113 come from *Genesis*, vi, 4. See also the apocryphal book of Enoch, noted by Kittredge, Paul und Braune's *Beiträge*, xiii, 210, who accounts for this tradition that Cain was the ancestor of evil monsters.

[3] Beowulf, the coming champion, has the strength (v. 379) of "thirty" men in his hand's grasp, and (v. 2361) swims to safety after Hygelac's defeat laden with "thirty" suits of mail on his arm. The reader will note the meagreness and haste of this account of the actual attack. No details are given. This brevity is of course due to the poet; and one can only guess at his motive.

atheling excellent, unblithe sat,
labored in woe for the loss of his thanes,
when once had been traced the trail of the fiend,
spirit accurst: too cruel that sorrow,
too long, too loathsome.[1] Not late the respite:
with night returning, anew began
ruthless murder; he recked no whit,
firm in his guilt, of the feud and crime.
They were easy to find who elsewhere sought
in room remote their rest at night,
bed in the bowers,[2] when that bale was shown,
was seen in sooth, with surest token, —
the hall-thane's[3] hate. Such held themselves
far and fast who the fiend outran!
Thus ruled unrighteous and raged his fill
one against all; until empty stood
that lordly building, and long it bode so.
Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,
sovran of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,
boundless cares. There came unhidden
tidings true to the tribes of men,
in sorrowful songs,[4] how ceaselessly Grendel
harassed Hrothgar, what hate he bore him,
what murder and massacre, many a year,
feud unfading, — refused consent

[1] See v. 191.

[2] The smaller buildings within the main enclosure but separate from the hall.

[3] So the text. Grendel, by his ravaging, is master of the hall; and there is no need to change to "hell-thane."

[4] The journalists of the day, Widsiths, Deors, Bernlefs, carried such tidings in their "sorrowful songs." So, too, perhaps, began the story of the actual downfall of the Burgundian kings, afterward the epic of the Nibelungs.

to deal with any of Daneland's earls,
make pact of peace, or compound for gold:
still less did the wise men ween to get
great fee for the feud from his fiendish hands.[1]
But the evil one ambushed old and young,
death-shadow dark, and dogged them still,
lured, and lurked in the livelong night
of misty moorlands: men may say not
where the haunts of these Hell-Runes[2] be.
Such heaping of horrors the hater of men,
lonely roamer, wrought unceasing,
harassings heavy. O'er Heorot he lorded,
gold-bright hall, in gloomy nights;
and ne'er could the prince[3] approach his throne,
— 'twas judgment of God, — or have joy in his hall.
Sore was the sorrow to Scyldings'-friend,
heart-rending misery. Many nobles
sat assembled, and searched out counsel
how it were best for bold-hearted men
against harassing terror to try their hand.
Whiles they vowed in their heathen fanes
altar-offerings, asked with words[4]
that the slayer-of-souls[5] would succor give them
for the pain of their people. Their practice this,

[1] He would of course pay no *wergild* for the men he had slain. So boasted a Norse bully once.

[2] "Sorcerers-of-hell." *Rune* is still used in Low German dialects for "witch."

[3] Hrothgar, who is the "Scyldings'-friend" of 170. A difficult passage.

[4] That is, in formal or prescribed phrase.

[5] In Psalm xcvi, 5 (Grein-Wülker, number 95): "All the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens." The Anglo-Saxon version reads: "All heathen gods are devils-of-war." . . .

their heathen hope ; 'twas Hell they thought of
in mood of their mind. Almighty they knew not,
Doomsman of Deeds [1] and dreadful Lord,
nor Heaven's-Helmet heeded they ever,
Wielder-of-Wonder. — Woe for that man
who in harm and hatred hales his soul
to fiery embraces ; — nor favor nor change
awaits he ever. But well for him
that after death-day may draw to his Lord,
and friendship find in the Father's arms!

III

Thus seethed [2] unceasing the son of Healfdene
with the woe of these days; not wisest men
assuaged his sorrow; too sore the anguish,
loathly and long, that lay on his folk,
most baneful of burdens and bales of the night.

This heard in his home Hygelac's thane,
great among Geats, of Grendel's doings.
He was the mightiest man of valor
in that same day of this our life,
stalwart and stately. A stout wave-walker
he bade make ready.[3] Yon battle-king, said he,
far o'er the swan-road he fain would seek,
the noble monarch who needed men !

[1] The complimentary excess of kennings for "God" is like the profusion in naming king or chieftain. See v. 345 f.

[2] How fast-colored this metaphor remained for poets it is hard to say. Certainly "bore" or "suffered" is too pale a rendering.

[3] This verse, rimed in modern fashion, must represent v. 194 of the original, which runs :

Thæt fram hâm gefrægn Hygelâces thegn. . . .

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The prince's journey by prudent folk
was little blamed, though they loved him dear ;
they whetted the hero, and hailed good omens.[1]
And now the bold one from bands of Geats
comrades chose, the keenest of warriors
e'er he could find; with fourteen men [2]
the sea-wood [3] he sought, and, sailor [4] proved,
led them on to the land's confines.
Time had now flown; [5] afloat was the ship,
boat under bluff. On board they climbed,
warriors ready; waves were churning
sea with sand; the sailors bore
on the breast of the bark their bright array,
their mail and weapons: the men pushed off,
on its willing way, the well-braced craft.
Then moved o'er the waters by might of the wind
that bark like a bird with breast of foam,
till in season due, on the second day,
the curvéd prow such course had run

[1] Literally, "looked about for signs and omens"; but by implication the omens are good. Many of these old customs are preserved in tradition or by record ; and the chapter of Tacitus's *Germania* is familiar which describes one of them in detail. By Hygelac's own account (vv. 1994 ff.) the friends of Beowulf did try to hold him back from his perilous undertaking.

[2] In the language of the original, and of modern golf, Beowulf goes on a "fifteen-some," as one of fifteen.

[3] Ship.

[4] In the *Nibelungen Lay* one is told that Siegfried — also a slayer of dragons and a winner of gold — is a good sailor (367, 3) :

Die rehten wazzerstrâze sint mir wol bekant.

In the next stanza the start of the ship is described; and Siegfried himself helps to push off from shore, using "a pole."

[5] That is, since Beowulf selected his ship and led his men to the harbor.

that sailors now could see the land,
sea-cliffs shining, steep high hills,
headlands broad. Their haven was found,
their journey ended. Up then quickly
the Weders'[1] clansmen climbed ashore,
anchored their sea-wood, with armor clashing
and gear of battle: God they thanked
for passing in peace o'er the paths of the sea.
Now saw from the cliff a Scylding clansman,
a warden[2] that watched the water-side,
how they bore o'er the gangway glittering shields,
war-gear in readiness; wonder seized him
to know what manner of men they were.
Straight to the strand his steed he rode,
Hrothgar's henchman; with hand of might
he shook his spear,[3] and spake in parley.
"Who are ye, then, ye arméd men,
mailéd folk, that yon mighty vessel
have urged thus over the ocean ways,
here o'er the waters? A warden I,
sentinel set o'er the sea-march here,
lest any foe to the folk of Danes
with harrying fleet should harm the land.
No aliens ever at ease thus bore them,

[1] One of the auxiliary names of the Geats, who by the reckoning of Bugge, Gering, and others, were Jutes. Jutland, says Gering, is truly called the *Wettermark*, "the land of storms." Others, a majority, put Geatland in Sweden.

[2] Possibly some unconscious reminiscence is here of the Roman coast-guard who once patrolled the Saxon Shore. Saxon pirates would well remember him. The stone-paved street (below, v. 320) points to similar traditions.

[3] Literally, "main-wood," "strength-wood." — The warden is not alone, but has with him an armed guard. See v. 293.

linden-wielders:[1] yet word-of-leave
clearly ye lack from clansmen here,
my folk's agreement. — A greater ne'er saw I
of warriors in world than is one of you, —
yon hero in harness! No henchman he
worthied by weapons, if witness his features,
his peerless presence! I pray you, though, tell
your folk and home, lest hence ye fare
suspect to wander your way as spies
in Danish land. Now, dwellers afar,
ocean-travellers, take from me
simple advice: the sooner the better
I hear of the country whence ye came."

IV

To him the stateliest[2] spake in answer;
the warriors' leader his word-hoard unlocked: —
"We are by kin of the clan of Geats,
and Hygelac's own hearth-fellows we.
To folk afar was my father known,
noble atheling, Ecgtheow named.
Full of winters, he fared away
agéd from earth; he is honored still
through width of the world by wise men all.
To thy lord and liege in loyal mood
we hasten hither, to Healfdene's son,
people-protector: be pleased to advise us!
To that mighty-one come we on mickle errand,

[1] Or: Not thus openly ever came warriors hither; yet . . .

[2] Literally, "Him the oldest answered." Compare modern uses of *elder* and *alderman*.

to the lord of the Danes ; nor deem I right
that aught be hidden. We hear — thou knowest
if sooth it is — the saying of men,
that amid the Scyldings a scathing monster,
dark ill-doer, in dusky nights
shows terrific his rage unmatched,
hatred and murder. To Hrothgar I
in greatness of soul would succor bring,
so the Wise-and-Brave [1] may worst his foes. —
if ever the end of ills is fated,
of cruel contest, if cure shall follow,
and the boiling care-waves [2] cooler grow ;
else ever afterward anguish-days
he shall suffer in sorrow while stands in place
high on its hill that house unpeered ! "
Astride his steed, the strand-ward answered,
clansman unquailing: " The keen-souled thane
must be skilled to sever and sunder duly
words and works, if he well intends.
I gather, this band is graciously bent
to the Scyldings' master. March, then, bearing
weapons and weeds the way I show you.
I will bid my men your boat meanwhile
to guard for fear lest foemen come, —
your new-tarred ship by shore of ocean
faithfully watching till once again
it waft o'er the waters those well-loved thanes,
— winding-neck'd wood, — to Weders' bounds,
heroes such as the hest of fate

[1] Hrothgar.

[2] This powerful metaphor is known also in Old-Norse ("sûsbreka," *Skirnismal*, 29) and in Old-Irish ("tuind mbroin," 'a billow of cares'). — Bugge.

shall succor and save from the shock of war."[1]
They bent them to march, — the boat lay still,
fettered by cable and fast at anchor,
broad-bosomed ship. — Then shone the boars[2]
over the cheek-guard; chased with gold,
keen and gleaming, guard it kept
o'er the man of war, as marched along
heroes in haste, till the hall they saw,
broad of gable and bright with gold:
that was the fairest, 'mid folk of earth,
of houses 'neath heaven, where Hrothgar lived,
and the gleam of it lightened o'er lands afar.
The sturdy shieldsman showed that bright
burg-of-the-boldest; bade them go
straightway thither; his steed then turned,
hardy hero, and hailed them thus: —
" 'Tis time that I fare from you. Father Almighty
in grace and mercy guard you well,
safe in your seekings. Seaward I go,
'gainst hostile warriors hold my watch."

[1] See Klaeber, *Modern Philology*, III, 250. In other words, the ship will carry back the survivors. Other translators take "the well-loved man" to be Beowulf, and read:

> for hero like him, by hest of fate
> shall surely fare from the fight unscathed.

[2] Holthausen points out that by verse 1453 Beowulf's helmet has several boar-images on it; he is the "man of war" (to be sure, a conjectural reading); and the boar-helmet guards him as typical representative of the marching party as a whole. The boar was sacred to Freyr, who was the favorite god of the Germanic tribes about the North Sea and the Baltic. Rude representations of warriors show the boar on the helmet quite as large as the helmet itself.

V

Stone-bright the street : [1] it showed the way
to the crowd of clansmen. Corselets glistened
hand-forged, hard ; on their harness bright
the steel ring sang,[2] as they strode along
in mail of battle, and marched to the hall.
There, weary of ocean, the wall along
they set their bucklers, their broad shields, down,
and bowed them to bench: the breastplates clanged,
war-gear of men ; their weapons stacked,
spears of the seafarers stood together,
gray-tipped ash : that iron band
was worthily weaponed ! — A warrior proud
asked of the heroes their home and kin.
" Whence, now, bear ye burnished shields,
harness gray and helmets grim,
spears in multitude ? Messenger, I,
Hrothgar's herald ! Heroes so many
ne'er met I as strangers of mood so strong.
'Tis plain that for prowess, not plunged into exile,
for high-hearted valor, Hrothgar ye seek ! "
Him the sturdy-in-war bespake with words,
proud earl of the Weders answer made,
hardy 'neath helmet : — " Hygelac's, we,

[1] Either merely paved, the *strata via* of the Romans, or else thought of as a sort of mosaic, an extravagant touch like the reckless waste of gold on the walls and roofs of a hall. — Stone buildings, it will be noted, are for old English poetry a mystery, a legacy of the past and its demi-gods — " work of giants " ; for prose they pass as fit only for kings. Asser in his *Life of Alfred* (ed. Stevenson, 91, 23, and p. 154) calls them *villae regiae*. The common Germanic hatred of cities and of stone houses is familiar from the rhetoric of Tacitus.

[2] See *Finnsburg*, vv. 7 f. for a more striking personification.

fellows at board ; I am Beowulf named.
I am seeking to say to the son of Healfdene
this mission of mine, to thy master-lord,
the doughty prince, if he deign at all
grace that we greet him, the good one, now."
Wulfgar spake, the Wendles' chieftain,
whose might of mind to many was known,
his courage and counsel : " The king of Danes,
the Scyldings' friend, I fain will tell,
the Breaker-of-Rings, as the boon thou askest,
the faméd prince, of thy faring hither,
and, swiftly after, such answer bring
as the doughty monarch may deign to give."
Hied then in haste to where Hrothgar sat
white-haired and old, his earls about him,
till the stout thane stood at the shoulder[1] there
of the Danish king : good courtier he !
Wulfgar spake to his winsome lord: —
" Hither have fared to thee far-come men
o'er the paths of ocean, people of Geatland;
and the stateliest[2] there by his sturdy band
is Beowulf named. This boon they seek,
that they, my master, may with thee
have speech at will: nor spurn their prayer
to give them hearing, gracious Hrothgar !
In weeds of the warrior worthy they,
methinks, of our liking ; their leader most surely,
a hero that hither his henchmen has led."

[1] " Before the shoulders," whatever position this was. Gering: " at the left shoulder of the lord of the land."

[2] Literally, " oldest." See above, v. 258.

VI

Hrothgar answered, helmet of Scyldings: —
"I knew him of yore in his youthful days;
his agéd father was Ecgtheow named,
to whom, at home, gave Hrethel the Geat
his only daughter.[1] Their offspring bold
fares hither to seek the steadfast friend.
And seamen, too, have said me this, —
who carried my gifts to the Geatish court,
thither for thanks, — he has thirty men's
heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand,
the bold-in-battle. Blesséd God
out of his mercy this man hath sent
to Danes of the West, as I ween indeed,
against horror of Grendel. I hope to give
the good youth gold for his gallant thought.
Be thou in haste, and bid them hither,
clan of kinsmen, to come before me;
and add this word, — they are welcome guests
to folk of the Danes."
[To the door of the hall
Wulfgar went[2]] and the word declared: —
"To you this message my master sends,
East-Danes' king, that your kin he knows,

[1] It is point of honor in the sovran — and the late Queen Victoria was proud of her accomplishment in this respect — to know all the nobles and royal persons in their relationship and descent. So Hildebrand, trying to make his son believe that the paternal claim is true, asks to be put to the test of genealogies and kinship: "If thou namest one only, the others I know." The loquacity of Hrothgar is both the royal leisurely way, and also an attempt of the poet to characterize the king, and set him apart.

[2] Grein's insertion to mend an evident omission of the scribe.

hardy heroes, and hails you all
welcome hither o'er waves of the sea!
Ye may wend your way in war-attire,
and under helmets Hrothgar greet;
but let here the battle-shields bide your parley,
and wooden war-shafts wait its end."
Uprose the mighty one, ringed with his men,
brave band of thanes: some bode without,
battle-gear guarding, as bade the chief.
Then hied that troop where the herald led them,
under Heorot's roof: [the hero strode,][1]
hardy 'neath helm, till the hearth he neared.[2]
Beowulf spake, — his breastplate gleamed,
war-net woven by wit of the smith: —
"Thou Hrothgar, hail! Hygelac's I,
kinsman and follower. Fame a plenty
have I gained in youth![3] These Grendel-deeds
I heard in my home-land heralded clear.
Seafarers say[4] how stands this hall,
of buildings best, for your band of thanes

[1] Grein's insertion.

[2] "Hardy beneath his helmet" is a common phrase in epic description. See above, v. 296, and *Nibelungen*, *under helme gân*, in many places. — The hearth, always in the middle of the hall, would be close to the throne, as Heyne points out in his essay on the situation and structure of Heorot, referring to an Anglo-Saxon document of the eleventh century. "Hearth" is more specific and better visualized than the mere "interior" of some readings.

[3] So all the old epic heroes; they have no passion for modesty.

Sum pius Aeneas fama super aethera notus,

is more vigorous trumpeting than even this blast from Beowulf. Dryden notes in his *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* that only the later heroes made anything of reticence as a manly virtue.

[4] See above, v. 377, and *Hildebrand*, v. 44. These "seafarers" are not necessarily sailors by profession, but any persons who fare over sea and bring the news; cf. v. 1818, "we seafarers" = Beowulf and his men.

empty and idle, when evening sun
in the harbor of heaven is hidden away.
So my vassals advised me well, —
brave and wise, the best of men, —
O sovran Hrothgar, to seek thee here,
for my nerve and my might they knew full well.
Themselves had seen me from slaughter come
blood-flecked from foes, where five I bound,
and that wild brood worsted. I' the waves I slew
nicors [1] by night, in need and peril
avenging the Weders,[2] whose woe they sought, —
crushing the grim ones. Grendel now,
monster cruel, be mine to quell
in single battle ! So, from thee,
thou sovran of the Shining-Danes,
Scyldings'-bulwark, a boon I seek, —
and, Friend-of-the-folk, refuse it not,
O Warriors'-shield, now I've wandered far, —
that I alone with my liegemen here,
this hardy band, may Heorot purge !
More I hear, that the monster dire,

[1] The *nicor*, says Bugge, is a hippopotamus; a walrus, says ten Brink. But that water-goblin who covers the space from Old Nick of jest to the Neckan and Nix of poetry and tale, is all one needs, and Nicor is a good name for him. Dan Michel in the fourteenth century renders sirens or sea-fairies by this word nicor. A glance, too, at Vigfusson's *Icelandic Dictionary*, s.v. "Nykr," is instructive. To square this story with vv. 550 ff., below, many emendations are proposed; but figures may be changed even in hunting-stories. Moreover, see vv. 574–7. There was genuine fear of sea-beasts among these men of the coast, and Horace's *monstra natantia* (I, iii, 18) would have appealed to them as no matter for jests. They enhance the horror of Nicor's Mere, below, v. 1425. Whales are specified in v. 541 as objects of fear; see note to v. 549.

[2] His own people, the Geats.

in his wanton mood, of weapons recks not;
hence shall I scorn — so Hygelac stay,
king of my kindred, kind to me! —
brand or buckler to bear in the fight,
gold-colored targe: but with gripe alone
must I front the fiend and fight for life,
foe against foe. Then faith be his [1]
in the doom of the Lord whom death shall take.
Fain, I ween, if the fight he win,
in this hall of gold my Geatish band
will he fearless eat, — as oft before, —
my noblest thanes.[2] Nor need'st thou then
to hide my head; [3] for his shall I be,
dyed in gore, if death must take me;
and my blood-covered body he'll bear as prey,
ruthless devour it, the roamer-lonely,
with my life-blood redden his lair in the fen:
no further for me need'st food prepare! [4]
To Hygelac send, if Hild [5] should take me,
best of war-weeds, warding my breast,

[1] Klaeber, with Earle: "he shall *resign himself* to the judgment." It is a kind of trial by battle; and perhaps the sense is that the one who falls in the fight may well have cause to believe in God's justice. But the common and ancient belief that "Wyrd goes as she must" is in the background.

[2] Literally, "the flower of my men" (Schücking); it is parallel to "Geatish band." This interpretation removes grave difficulties from the passage. "As oft before" is a general and pregnant phrase referring to Grendel's previous attacks on the Danish clansmen.

[3] That is, cover it as with a face-cloth. "There will be no need of funeral rites."

[4] The fondness for emphasis by understatement — litotes — here takes the form of anticlimax.

[5] Personification of Battle. That personal and mythological force lingers in the word seems clear from its uses in poetry.

armor excellent, heirloom of Hrethel
and work of Wayland.[1] Fares Wyrd[2] as she must."

VII

Hrothgar spake, the Scyldings'-helmet: —
"For fight defensive, Friend my Beowulf,
to succor and save, thou hast sought us here.
Thy father's combat[3] a feud enkindled
when Heatholaf with hand he slew
among the Wylfings; his Weder kin
for horror of fighting feared to hold him.
Fleeing, he sought our South-Dane folk,
over surge of ocean the Honor-Scyldings,
when first I was ruling the folk[4] of Danes,
wielded, youthful, this widespread realm,
this hoard-hold of heroes. Heorogar was dead,
my elder brother, had breathed his last,
Healfdene's bairn: he was better than I!
Straightway the feud with fee[5] I settled,
to the Wylfings sent, o'er watery ridges,
treasures olden: oaths he[6] swore me.

[1] The Germanic Vulcan. See below, *Deor's Song*, and notes.

[2] Compare the personifying force in a phrase of the *Heliand*, "Thy Wyrd stands near thee," — thy fated hour is nigh. This mighty power, whom the Christian poet can still revere, has here the general force of "Destiny." Chaucer glosses the plural (*Wirdes*) as Destiny, but Macbeth has no doubt of the "personification" when he meets the Weird-Sisters, that is, sister fates.

[3] There is no irrelevance here. Hrothgar sees in Beowulf's mission a heritage of duty, a return of the good offices which the Danish king rendered to Beowulf's father in time of dire need. — F. Seebohm, *Tribal Customs in Anglo-Saxon Law*, London, 1902, comments on this ethical side of the feud, and makes great use of the material in *Beowulf*.

[4] Repeated from v. 463, also in the original.

[5] Money, for wergild, or man-price. [6] Ecgtheow, Beowulf's sire.

Sore is my soul to say to any
of the race of man what ruth for me
in Heorot Grendel with hate hath wrought,
what sudden harryings. Hall-folk fail me,
my warriors wane; for Wyrd hath swept them
into Grendel's grasp. But God is able
this deadly foe from his deeds to turn!
Boasted full oft, as my beer they drank,
earls o'er the ale-cup, arméd men,
that they would bide in the beer-hall here,
Grendel's attack with terror of blades.[1]
Then was this mead-house at morning tide
dyed with gore, when the daylight broke,
all the boards of the benches blood-besprinkled,
gory the hall: I had heroes the less,
doughty dear-ones that death had reft.
— But sit to the banquet, unbind thy words,
hardy hero, as heart shall prompt thee."

Gathered together, the Geatish men
in the banquet-hall on bench assigned,
sturdy-spirited, sat them down,
hardy-hearted. A henchman attended,
carried the carven cup in hand,
served the clear mead. Oft minstrels sang
blithe in Heorot. Heroes revelled,
no dearth of warriors,[2] Weder and Dane.

[1] "With terrible blades," — drawn swords. — "Boast" is not used in the modern sense, nor was it "Dutch courage" that inspired the utterance. As in the Indian war-dance, so at the Germanic feast in hall or camp before battle, the warrior was expected to make his *beót* or promise of prowess, — and to keep it. These vaunts easily lent themselves to jocose treatment in the declining days of epic or romance; witness the famous "gabs" in *Charlemagne's Journey to Jerusalem.*

[2] In spite of v. 476, Hrothgar still has a large band of retainers.

VIII

Unferth[1] spake, the son of Ecglaf,
who sat at the feet of the Scyldings' lord,
unbound the battle-runes.[2] — Beowulf's quest,
sturdy seafarer's, sorely galled him ;
ever he envied that other men
should more achieve in middle-earth
of fame under heaven than he himself. —
"Art thou that Beowulf, Breca's rival,
who emulous swam on the open sea,
when for pride the pair of you proved the floods,
and wantonly dared in waters deep
to risk your lives? No living man,
or lief or loath, from your labor dire
could you dissuade, from swimming the main.
Ocean-tides with your arms ye covered,
with strenuous hands the sea-streets measured,
swam o'er the waters. Winter's storm
rolled the rough waves. In realm of sea
a sennight strove ye. In swimming he topped thee,
had more of main! Him at morning-tide
billows bore to the Battling Reamas,[3]

[1] Spelled Hunferth in the text, but always riming with vowels.

[2] "Began the fight." — But here is scarcely the flyting, or song-contest, found everywhere among peoples in a primitive stage of culture. It is rather a report of the spirited way in which Beowulf carried off the laurels in the "hazing" of the guest by a competent official of the host. Probably this test was part of the formal reception ; but it seems a strange survival in epic by the side of the courtly and extravagant compliments exchanged between Beowulf and Hrothgar. In Scandinavian sources one gets the rough flyting in its coarseness and strength. See the *Lokasenna*, above all, and the cases reported by Saxo. In one the prizes are peculiar: a queen's necklace, the man's life.

[3] Bugge places the home of these Heathoreamas in Southern Norway. He also notes a parallel swimming-match in the *Egilssaga*.

whence he hied to his home so dear,
beloved of his liegemen, to land of Brondings,
fastness fair, where his folk he ruled,
town and treasure. In triumph o'er thee
Beanstan's bairn[1] his boast achieved.
So ween I for thee a worse adventure
— though in buffet of battle thou brave hast been,
in struggle grim, — if Grendel's approach
thou darst await through the watch of night!"

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: —
"What a deal hast uttered, dear my Unferth,
drunken with beer, of Breca now,
told of his triumph! Truth I claim it,
that I had more of might in the sea
than any man else, more ocean-endurance.
We twain had talked, in time of youth,
and made our boast, — we were merely boys,
striplings still, — to stake our lives
far at sea: and so we performed it.
Naked swords, as we swam along,
we held in hand, with hope to guard us
against the whales. Not a whit from me
could he float afar o'er the flood of waves,
haste o'er the billows; nor him I abandoned.
Together we twain on the tides abode
five nights full till the flood divided us,
churning waves and chillest weather,
darkling night, and the northern wind
ruthless rushed on us: rough was the surge.
Now the wrath of the sea-fish[2] rose apace;

[1] Breca.

[2] Partly founded on actual experience of angry whales, as York Powell pointed out, and partly on doings of mythical beasts of the sea.

yet me 'gainst the monsters my mailéd coat,
hard and hand-linked, help afforded, —
battle-sark braided my breast to ward,
garnished with gold. There grasped me firm
and haled me to bottom the hated foe,
with grimmest gripe. 'Twas granted me, though,
to pierce the monster with point of sword,
with blade of battle: huge beast of the sea
was whelmed by the hurly through hand of mine.

IX

Me thus often the evil monsters
throngíng threatened. With thrust of my sword,
the darling, I dealt them due return!
Nowise had they bliss from their booty then
to devour their victim, vengeful creatures,
seated to banquet at bottom of sea;
but at break of day, by my brand sore hurt,
on the edge of ocean up they lay,
put to sleep by the sword. And since, by them
on the fathomless sea-ways sailor-folk
are never molested. — Light from east,
came bright God's beacon; the billows sank,
so that I saw the sea-cliffs high,
windy walls. For Wyrd oft saveth
earl undoomed if he doughty be![1]

[1] A Germanic commonplace. It occurs in the *Andreas* of Cynewulf, in part in the *Hildebrand Lay*, v. 55, and in sundry Norse poems. "Undoomed" is "one who is not fey." — *Da sterbent wan die veigen*, *Nibelungen*, 149, "only the fey die," may be compared with the ballad phrase in *Archie o' Cawfield*, Child, III, 489:

And so it came that I killed with my sword
nine of the nicors. Of night-fought battles
ne'er heard I a harder 'neath heaven's dome,
nor adrift on the deep a more desolate man!
Yet I came unharmed from that hostile clutch,
though spent with swimming. The sea upbore me,
flood of the tide, on Finnish [1] land,
the welling waters. No wise of thee [2]
have I heard men tell such terror of falchions,
bitter battle. Breca ne'er yet,
not one of you pair, in the play of war
such daring deed has done at all
with bloody brand, — I boast not of it! —

"There'll no man die but him that's fee. . . ."

Schücking, in *Englische Studien*, 39, p. 104, insists on a different translation of this passage. "Undoomed," he suggests, is proleptic; and the poet really says "fate often saves a hero — who then, of course, is not a doomed man, — if he be brave." It is true that the proleptic construction is found in Anglo-Saxon; and the interpretation is possible. Practically the same case occurs when Horace tells Lydia (III, ix) that he would die for Chloe if the fates would but spare this love of his and let her live; —

Si parcent animae fata superstiti.

But the present passage hardly needs this subtle interpretation, and evidently means that fate often spares a man who is not doomed, really devoted to death, if he is a brave man, in a word, favors the brave if favor be possible. Weird sisters and fey folk survived long in Scottish tradition.

[1] The Finnish folk, as Gering points out, we now call Laplanders.

[2] This speech of Beowulf's is admirable. He has defended his own reputation, shrugs his shoulders at the necessity of referring to his prowess, and makes a home-thrust at Unferth. The climax of his invective is imputation to Unferth of the two supreme sins in the Germanic list: murder of kin, and cowardice. — Below, v. 1167, Unferth is said to be courageous, but faithless to his kin. — Then the hero-orator proceeds to promise or "boast" what he himself will do; and with his cheerful "gab" the speech closes amid general applause.

though thou wast the bane [1] of thy brethren dear,
thy closest kin, whence curse of hell
awaits thee, well as thy wit may serve!
For I say in sooth, thou son of Ecglaf,
never had Grendel these grim deeds wrought,
monster dire, on thy master dear,
in Heorot such havoc, if heart of thine
were as battle-bold as thy boast is loud!
But he has found no feud will happen;
from sword-clash dread of your Danish clan
he vaunts him safe, from the Victor-Scyldings.
He forces pledges, favors none
of the land of Danes, but lustily murders,
fights and feasts, nor feud he dreads
from Spear-Dane men. But speedily now
shall I prove him the prowess and pride of the Geats,
shall bid him battle. Blithe to mead
go he that listeth, when light of dawn
this morrow morning o'er men of earth,
ether-robed sun from the south shall beam!"
Joyous then was the Jewel-giver,
hoar-haired, war-brave; help awaited
the Bright-Danes' prince, from Beowulf hearing,
folk's good shepherd, such firm resolve.
Then was laughter of liegemen loud resounding
with winsome words. Came Wealhtheow forth,

[1] Murderer. —

"Though thou hast murdered thy mother's sons," —

would translate the passage less directly but without an archaism. — Beowulf is glad to think as he dies that he is free from murder of kin; see below, v. 2742. The kin-bond, of course, was or should be very strong. See Beda's story of Imma, *Eccl. Hist.*, iv, 22; and Schofield's summary of *Signy's Lament* for the Volsung case.

queen of Hrothgar, heedful of courtesy,
gold-decked, greeting the guests in hall;
and the high-born lady handed the cup
first to the East-Danes' heir and warden,
bade him be blithe at the beer-carouse,
the land's beloved one. Lustily took he
banquet and beaker, battle-famed king.
Through the hall then went the Helmings'Lady,
to younger and older everywhere
carried the cup,[1] till came the moment
when the ring-graced queen, the royal-hearted,
to Beowulf bore the beaker of mead.
She greeted the Geats' lord, God she thanked,
in wisdom's words, that her will was granted,
that at last on a hero her hope could lean
for comfort in terrors. The cup he took,
hardy-in-war, from Wealhtheow's hand,
and answer uttered the eager-for-combat.
Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: —

[1] Literally, "jewelled-vessel"; but as Banning points out, this refers simply to the office of passing the cup, not, as in *Widsith*, 102, to the giving of "lordly gifts," as some translate the phrase. The *Gnomic Verses*, preserved in the Exeter Book, are explicit about the duties of a noble dame in such cases. She must be (see Grein-Wülker, I, 346) —

> fond of her folk, and full of cheer,
> fast in a secret, and free of hand
> with steeds and treasure: serving the mead
> in the crowd of clansmen, constant alway
> Defence-of-Athelings first to greet,
> to carry the cup to the king's hand first,
> quickly still, and counsel render
> ever to him and his heroes all.

The Defence-of-Athelings is, of course, the king. "Steeds and treasure" is the usual phrase for "gifts." Wealhtheow answers well to all these requirements.

"This was my thought, when my thanes and I
bent to the ocean and entered our boat,
that I would work the will of your people
fully, or fighting fall in death,
in fiend's gripe fast. I am firm to do
an earl's brave deed, or end the days
of this life of mine in the mead-hall here."
Well these words to the woman seemed,
Beowulf's battle-boast. — Bright with gold
the stately dame by her spouse sat down.
Again, as erst, began in hall
warriors' wassail and words of power,
the proud-band's revel,[1] till presently
the son of Healfdene hastened to seek
rest for the night; he knew there waited
fight for the fiend in that festal hall,
when the sheen of the sun they saw no more,
and dusk of night sank darkling nigh,
and shadowy shapes came striding on,
wan under welkin. The warriors rose.
Man to man, he made harangue,
Hrothgar to Beowulf, bade him hail,
let him wield the wine hall: a word he added: —
"Never to any man erst I trusted,
since I could heave up hand and shield,
this noble Dane-Hall, till now to thee.

[1] Literally, "clamor of the victorious people." The phrase is formal, as in so many cases; for just now, and in v. 597, any adjective would suit the Danes better than "victorious," nor can this count as proleptic. So in the English Ballads there is a false "true love," — i.e. "affianced," — or other contradiction, with similar formal use. Compare the phrase "excellent iron," v. 2586, below, for a sword that has just failed to "bite."

Have now and hold this house unpeered ;
remember thy glory ; thy might declare ;
watch for the foe! No wish shall fail thee
if thou bidest the battle with bold-won life."

X

Then Hrothgar went with his hero-train,
defence-of-Scyldings, forth from hall ;
fain would the war-lord Wealhtheow seek,
couch of his queen. The King-of-Glory
against this Grendel a guard had set,
so heroes heard, a hall-defender,
who warded the monarch and watched for the monster.
In truth, the Geats' prince gladly trusted
his mettle, his might, the mercy of God![1]
Cast off then his corselet of iron,
helmet from head ; to his henchman gave, —
choicest of weapons, — the well-chased sword,
bidding him guard the gear of battle.
Spake then his Vaunt[2] the valiant man,
Beowulf Geat, ere the bed he sought : —
" Of force in fight no feebler I count me,
in grim war-deeds, than Grendel deems him.
Not with the sword, then, to sleep of death
his life will I give, though it lie in my power.
No skill is his to strike against me,

[1] See above, vv. 572 f.

[2] This Vaunt, or Boast, spoken to the hero's few comrades on the eve of the vigil and fight, is different from the Vaunt at the banquet, and in its sentimental turn has some distant resemblance to the later " Good-Nights," particularly the type of *Lord Maxwell's Last Good-Night.*

my shield to hew though he hardy be,
bold in battle ; we both, this night,
shall spurn the sword, if he seek me here,
unweaponed, for war. Let wisest God,
sacred Lord, on which side soever
doom decree as he deemeth right."
Reclined then the chieftain, and cheek-pillows held
the head of the earl, while all about him
seamen hardy on hall-beds sank.
None of them thought that thence their steps
to the folk and fastness that fostered them,
to the land they loved, would lead them back!
Full well they wist that on warriors many
battle-death seized, in the banquet-hall,
of Danish clan. But comfort and help,
war-weal weaving, to Weder folk
the Master gave,[1] that, by might of one,
over their enemy all prevailed,
by single strength. In sooth 'tis told
that highest God o'er human kind
hath wielded ever ! — Thro' wan night striding,
came the walker-in-shadow. Warriors slept
whose hest was to guard the gabled hall, —
all save one. 'Twas widely known
that against God's will the ghostly ravager
him[2] could not hurl to haunts of darkness ;
wakeful, ready, with warrior's wrath,
bold he bided the battle's issue.

[1] The usual mingling of pagan tradition and Christian doctrine. The weaving, as in classical myths, is work of the Norns, or fates, but God disposes it as he will. Often, however, the Germanic fates stand alone at their loom. "Wyrd wove me this."

[2] Beowulf, — the "one." *Ms.* has "them."

XI

Then from the moorland, by misty crags,
with God's wrath laden, Grendel came.
The monster was minded of mankind now
sundry to seize in the stately house.
Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there,
gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned,
flashing with fretwork.[1] Not first time, this,
that he the home of Hrothgar sought, —
yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,
such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!
To the house the warrior walked apace,[2]
parted from peace ;[3] the portal opened,
though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had struck it,

[1] Whether the hall "flashed" or "glittered" to the monster's vision as he came near, in this nocturnal raid, does not concern the poet, who uses a conventional description.

[2] This is the third announcement of the arrival, and it is such seemingly vain repetitions that caused Müllenhoff, ten Brink, Möller, and others to assume interpolations by several hands and to regard the poem as a series of "editions," on the basis of a general accretion from short lays to the present conglomerate of adaptations, interpolations, and inconsistencies. The accretion theory is not ridiculous by any means ; but it does not explain the *Beowulf* half so well as the assumption of a single author who wrote the present poem on the basis of old lays, and applied in its general construction the same methods of variation and repetition which obtain for every rhythmic period and almost for every sentence in Anglo-Saxon poetry at large. The first announcement of Grendel's coming emphasizes the fact that it is by night ; the second lays stress on the start from the moor ; the third brings him to the hall, and to the action. See the same sort of repetition for an arrival, vv. 1640, 1644, below. If we will only apply to the whole web of narrative what we know of the web of sentence and period, much of the supposed awkwardness, "poor mendings," "patchwork," and so on, will prove simply the habit of all that national epic. — See also Hart, *Ballad and Epic*, pp. 194 ff.

[3] That is, he was a "lost soul," doomed to hell.

and baleful he burst in his blatant rage,
the house's mouth. All hastily, then,
o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on,
ireful he strode ; there streamed from his eyes
fearful flashes, like flame to see.
He spied in hall the hero-band,
kin and clansmen clustered asleep,
hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart ;
for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,
savage, to sever the soul of each,
life from body, since lusty banquet
waited his will ! But Wyrd forbade him
to seize any more of men on earth
after that evening.[1] Eagerly watched
Hygelac's kinsman his cursed foe,
how he would fare in fell attack.
Not that the monster was minded to pause !
Straightway he seized a sleeping warrior[2]
for the first, and tore him fiercely asunder,
the bone-frame bit, drank blood in streams,
swallowed him piecemeal : swiftly thus
the lifeless corse was clear devoured,
e'en feet and hands. Then farther he hied ;
for the hardy hero with hand he grasped,
felt for the foe with fiendish claw,
for the hero reclining, — who clutched it boldly,
prompt to answer, propped on his arm.[3]

[1] It is a trait of the national epic, partly explained by the familiar nature of the stories which it told, to anticipate in this way the issue of an adventure and then go back to the details.

[2] His name was Hondscio. See below, v. 2076.

[3] Some read : "prompt to answer, opposed the arm." The text is not too clear ; but the situation is what one would expect, and the awkwardness of the translation does not cloud the facts.

Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils
that never he met in this middle-world,
in the ways of earth, another wight
with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,
sorrowed in soul, — none the sooner escaped!
Fain would he flee, his fastness seek,
the den of devils: no doings now
such as oft he had done in days of old!
Then bethought him the hardy Hygelac-thane
of his boast at evening: up he bounded,
grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked.
The fiend made off, but the earl close followed.
The monster meant — if he might at all —
to fling himself free, and far away
fly to the fens, — knew his fingers' power
in the gripe of the grim one. Gruesome march
to Heorot this monster of harm had made!
Din filled the room; the Danes were bereft,
castle-dwellers and clansmen all,
earls, of their ale.[1] Angry were both[2]

[1] This rendering, backed by Bugge, Holthausen, and Heyne, is quite as good as the mere "terrified" of translators who balk at the undignified notion of spilt beer. But "the ale-bench" is too familiar in the epic for such scruples; and the hall was primarily intended for the Germanic *dréam*, which meant the revel of drinking men. "The ale was all upset" is as much as to say "men feared there would be no more joy in Heorot," so rocked and tottered the great building. It is a phrase parallel to the "bulging breast" for anger, and such survivals of the primitive methods of speech; and, as has been suggested, may well have seemed archaic to the poet who copied traditional lines.

[2] Yet Grendel has shown the white feather from the start. This "angry" is also conventional; "desperate with fear" is the word for the fiend. — Beowulf's easy victory here should be compared to his far more hazardous fight with Grendel's mother, when his strength seems not to help, and he has to use a weapon.

those savage hall-guards: the house resounded.
Wonder it was the wine-hall firm
in the strain of their struggle stood, to earth
the fair house fell not; too fast it was
within and without by its iron bands
craftily clamped; though there crashed from sill
many a mead-bench — men have told me —
gay with gold, where the grim foes wrestled.
So well had weened the wisest Scyldings
that not ever at all might any man
that bone-decked, brave house break asunder,
crush by craft, — unless clasp of fire
in smoke engulfed it. — Again uprose
din redoubled. Danes of the North
with fear and frenzy were filled, each one,
who from the wall that wailing heard,
God's foe sounding his grisly song,
cry of the conquered, clamorous pain
from captive of hell. Too closely held him
he who of men in might was strongest
in that same day of this our life.

XII

Not in any wise would the earls'-defence [1]
suffer that slaughterous stranger to live,
useless [2] deeming his days and years
to men on earth. Now many an earl
of Beowulf brandished blade ancestral,
fain the life of their lord to shield,
their praiséd prince, if power were theirs;

[1] Kenning for Beowulf.
[2] Litotes for "dangerous," "destructive."

never they knew, — as they neared the foe,
hardy-hearted heroes of war,
aiming their swords on every side
the accursed to kill, — no keenest blade,
no fairest of falchions fashioned on earth,
could harm or hurt that hideous fiend!
He was safe,[1] by his spells, from sword of battle,
from edge of iron. Yet his end and parting
on that same day of this our life
woful should be, and his wandering soul
far off flit to the fiends' domain.
Soon he found, who in former days,
harmful in heart and hated of God,
on many a man such murder wrought,
that the frame of his body failed him now.
For him the keen-souled kinsman of Hygelac
held in hand; hateful alive
was each to other. The outlaw dire
took mortal hurt; a mighty wound
showed on his shoulder, and sinews cracked,
and the bone-frame burst. To Beowulf now
the glory was given, and Grendel thence
death-sick his den in the dark moor sought,
noisome abode:[2] he knew too well
that here was the last of life, an end
of his days on earth. — To all the Danes
by that bloody battle the boon had come.
From ravage had rescued the roving stranger

[1] Also his mother, against whom Beowulf's sword is wielded in vain; below, v. 1522.

[2] Schücking, *Beowulf's Rückkehr*, p. 10, notes the resemblance of this fight to the struggles between a saint and the devil or devils, as, for example, in *Juliana*, vv. 288, 554 ff., and St. Dunstan's affair with Satan.

Hrothgar's hall; the hardy and wise one
had purged it anew. His night-work pleased him,
his deed and its honor. To Eastern Danes
had the valiant Geat his vaunt made good,
all their sorrow and ills assuaged,
their bale of battle borne so long,
and all the dole they erst endured,
pain a-plenty. — 'Twas proof of this,
when the hardy-in-fight a hand [1] laid down,
arm and shoulder, — all, indeed,
of Grendel's gripe,[2] — 'neath the gabled roof.

XIII

Many at morning, as men have told me,
warriors gathered the gift-hall round,
folk-leaders faring from far and near,
o'er wide-stretched ways, the wonder to view,
trace of the traitor. Not troublous [3] seemed
the enemy's end to any man
who saw by the gait of the graceless foe
how the weary-hearted, away from thence,
baffled in battle and banned, his steps
death-marked dragged to the devils' mere.[4]

[1] Hadding, in the forest by night sheltered by a rude tent of twigs, sees "a hand of extraordinary size" wandering about. His nurse, a giantess, holds the hand while Hadding hews it off, and "corrupt matter" flows from it. Tearing and rending with their claws is the giants' way. See Saxo, Bk. I (Holder, p. 23), and Elton's translation.

[2] That is, all Grendel's machinery of grasp, both clutch and reach. The translation "fist" will not do. The concluding nine lines of this section are compared by ten Brink with the last stanza of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered.*

[3] Note the favorite litotes.

[4] Sea or Lake of the Nicors. Indefinite talk of the moorland or fen as home of the monsters here yields to the idea of home in the waters. The

Bloody the billows were boiling there,
turbid the tide of tumbling waves
horribly seething, with sword-blood hot,
by that doomed one dyed, who in den of the moor
laid forlorn his life adown,
his heathen soul, — and hell received it.
Home then rode the hoary clansmen
from that merry journey, and many a youth,
on horses white, the hardy warriors,
back from the mere. Then Beowulf's glory
eager they echoed, and all averred
that from sea to sea, or south or north,
there was no other in earth's domain,
under vault of heaven, more valiant found,
of warriors none more worthy to rule!
(On their lord beloved they laid no slight,
gracious Hrothgar : a good king he !)
From time to time, the tried-in-battle
their gray [1] steeds set to gallop amain,
and ran a race when the road seemed fair.
From time to time, a thane of the king,[2]

water-hell was familiar to Germanic traditions ; in Scandinavia it takes very definite form ; and even in the *Heliand*, translation of the gospels, we read of the punishments of the waters, *wateres witi*.

[1] "Fallow." Just now the horses were "white" ; and in v. 916 it will be the roads that are "fallow." Color schemes are not very exact in our old poetry, and color was not used to any extent in visualizing a scene. The popular ballads show the same lack of clearness.

[2] Warriors often improvised lays of their own battles, and so laid the foundation of epic ; thus Gaston Paris, in his *Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*, for French sources. This thane of Hrothgar may have been a professional minstrel in the eyes of the epic poet who made the *Beowulf ;* but there is a possibility of his amateur standing. In any case, he improvises a lay on Beowulf's adventure, as he rides along, and uses his store of traditional phrase and comment in the process. If the epithet applied to him

who had made many vaunts, and was mindful of verses,
stored with sagas and songs of old,
bound word to word in well-knit rime,
welded his lay; this warrior soon
of Beowulf's quest right cleverly sang,
and artfully added an excellent tale,
in well-ranged words, of the warlike deeds
he had heard in saga of Sigemund.[1]
Strange the story: he said it all, —[2]
the Wælsing's wanderings wide, his struggles,
which never were told to tribes of men,
the feuds and the frauds,[3] save to Fitela only,
when of these doings he deigned to speak,
uncle to nephew; as ever the twain
stood side by side in stress of war,

by the epic, *guma gilphlæden*, means "a man laden with vaunts" and not simply "a warrior who had made many vaunts and performed them, that is, covered with glory," — and the former rendering is preferable, — then yet another accomplishment of the Germanic warrior is indicated. He could probably sing his *beot*, or vaunt, in good verse. Specimens of such a vaunt, sung, however, by a North American Indian at the war-dance, and improvised to the rhythm of the bystanders' choral singing, can be studied with some application to the Germanic problem, — for the cruder forms of improvisation, to be sure, and not for a finished chant of adventure like this in question, which is followed by traditional verse dealing with the Germanic heroic legend. — It is told of William of Orange, a hero of medieval song, born about 754, that when he was riding as a monk through the forest, he caused a song in praise of his own deeds to be sung by a retainer who rode in his train. — The Canterbury pilgrims were keeping old custom when they told tales as they rode; but improvisation in verse was no longer expected.

[1] In the *Nibelungen Lay* this adventure is told of Siegfried, son of Sigmund, who is son of Wæls. In the *Volsunga Saga* (Wælsings) Sinfiotli (=Fitela) is son to Sigmund by his sister Signy. See the introduction to *Deor's Song*, below. Beowulf is thus ranged at once with heroes of Germanic legend.

[2] Literally, "he told the whole story, . . . much of it unknown. . ."

[3] That is, betrayals, treacheries.

and multitude of the monster kind
they had felled with their swords. Of Sigemund grew,
when he passed from life, no little praise ;
for the doughty-in-combat a dragon killed
that herded the hoard :[1] under hoary rock
the atheling dared the deed alone,
fearful quest, nor was Fitela there.
Yet so it befell, his falchion pierced
that wondrous worm ; — on the wall it struck,
best blade ; the dragon died in its blood.
Thus had the dread-one by daring achieved
over the ring-hoard to rule at will,
himself to pleasure ; a sea-boat he loaded,
and bore on its bosom the beaming gold,
son of Wæls ; the worm was consumed.
He had of all heroes the highest renown
among races of men, this refuge-of-warriors,
for deeds of daring that decked his name
since[2] the hand and heart of Heremod
grew slack in battle. He, swiftly banished
to mingle with monsters[3] at mercy of foes,

[1] "Guarded the treasure." — The "brief abstract" style of this report of the singer's lay befits a tale which was known to hearers of lay and epic alike. Sigmund is the type with which Beowulf is compared, the good and great hero ; while Heremod, admirably introduced, serves as antitype. The latter is probably the Lotherus of Saxo's history, son of Dan, of the royal Danish house, the brave king who turns tyrant and is at last slain by a desperate and outraged folk. For further reference to him, see below, vv. 1709 ff. and 2177 ff.

[2] Müllenhoff's rendering, and the best. Heremod, one is told, might have rivalled and surpassed Sigmund, but the former fell from grace, turned tyrant, and in fact was precisely what the aspiring hero should not be, — quite the opposite, say, of this glorious Beowulf.

[3] Probably "devils in hell," who would also be the foes. Others take the banishment literally, — as if to actual giants, who soon compassed the king's death.

to death was betrayed; for torrents of sorrow
had lamed him too long ;[1] a load of care
to earls and athelings all he proved.
Oft indeed, in earlier days,
for the warrior's wayfaring[2] wise men mourned,
who had hoped of him help from harm and bale,
and had thought their sovran's son[3] would thrive,
follow his father, his folk protect,
the hoard and the stronghold, heroes' land,
home of Scyldings. — But here, thanes said,
the kinsman of Hygelac kinder seemed
to all: the other[4] was urged to crime!

And afresh to the race,[5] the fallow roads
by swift steeds measured! The morning sun
was climbing higher. Clansmen hastened
to the high-built hall, those hardy-minded,
the wonder to witness. Warden of treasure,
crowned with glory, the king himself,
with stately band from the bride-bower strode;

[1] Bugge emends:

With torrents of sorrow
he had long lamed his landfolk; a load of care . . .

and understands the "earlier days" in v. 907 as the days before Heremod's real tyranny began, though his subjects were already chafing at his folly and neglect.

[2] "Way of life" (Wyatt). Sievers refers it to the assumed literal banishment. Or does it mean some wild adventure undertaken when the king should have been caring for his folk at home?

[3] See vv. 20 ff., above: "So becomes it a youth . . ."

[4] *Sc.* Heremod.

[5] The singer has sung his lays, and the epic resumes its story. The time-relations are not altogether good in this long passage which describes the rejoicings of "the day after"; but the present shift from the riders on the road to the folk at the hall is not very violent, and is of a piece with the general narrative style.

and with him the queen and her crowd of maidens
measured the path to the mead-house fair.

XIV

Hrothgar spake, — to the hall he went,
stood by the steps, the steep roof saw,
garnished with gold, and Grendel's hand: —
"For the sight I see to the Sovran Ruler
be speedy thanks! A throng of sorrows
I have borne from Grendel; but God still works
wonder on wonder, the Warden-of-Glory.
It was but now that I never more
for woes that weighed on me waited help
long as I lived, when, laved in blood,
stood sword-gore-stained this stateliest house, —
widespread woe for wise men all,
who had no hope to hinder ever
foes infernal and fiendish sprites
from havoc in hall. This hero now,
by the Wielder's might, a work has done
that not all of us erst could ever do
by wile and wisdom. Lo, well can she say
whoso of women this warrior bore
among sons of men, if still she liveth,
that the God of the ages was good to her
in the birth of her bairn. Now, Beowulf, thee,
of heroes best, I shall heartily love
as mine own, my son; preserve thou ever
this kinship new: thou shalt never lack
wealth of the world that I wield as mine!
Full oft for less have I largess showered,
my precious hoard, on a punier man,

less stout in struggle. Thyself hast now
fulfilled such deeds, that thy fame shall endure
through all the ages. As ever he did,
well may the Wielder reward thee still!"
Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: —
"This work of war most willingly
we have fought, this fight, and fearlessly dared
force of the foe. Fain, too, were I
hadst thou but seen himself, what time
the fiend in his trappings tottered to fall!
Swiftly, I thought, in strongest gripe
on his bed of death to bind him down,
that he in the hent of this hand of mine
should breathe his last: but he broke away.[1]
Him I might not — the Maker willed not —
hinder from flight, and firm enough hold
the life-destroyer: too sturdy was he,
the ruthless, in running! For rescue, however,
he left behind him his hand in pledge,
arm and shoulder; nor aught of help
could the curséd one thus procure at all.
None the longer liveth he, loathsome fiend,
sunk in his sins, but sorrow holds him
tightly grasped in gripe of anguish,
in baleful bonds, where bide he must,
evil outlaw, such awful doom
as the Mighty Maker shall mete him out."

More silent seemed the son of Ecglaf[2]
in boastful speech of his battle-deeds,

[1] Literally, "I intended . . . if his body had not slipped away."
[2] Unferth, Beowulf's sometime opponent in the flyting.

since athelings all, through the earl's great prowess,
beheld that hand, on the high roof gazing,[1]
foeman's fingers, — the forepart of each
of the sturdy nails to steel was likest, —
heathen's "hand-spear," hostile warrior's
claw uncanny. 'Twas clear, they said,
that him no blade of the brave could touch,
how keen soever, or cut away
that battle-hand bloody from baneful foe.

XV

There was hurry and hest in Heorot now
for hands to bedeck it, and dense was the throng
of men and women the wine-hall to cleanse,
the guest-room to garnish. Gold-gay shone the hangings
that were wove on the wall, and wonders many
to delight each mortal that looks upon them.
Though braced within by iron bands,
that building bright was broken sorely ;[2]
rent were its hinges ; the roof alone
held safe and sound, when, seared with crime,
the fiendish foe his flight essayed,

[1] That is, as Klaeber points out, *Modern Philology*, III, 256, the nobles look from outside "in the direction of the high roof, and behold the hand." Beowulf, he says, "had placed Grendel's hand . . . (on some projection perhaps) above the door (outside) as high as he could reach." But ten Brink (*Beowulf*, p. 63) takes for granted that the hand was placed inside the hall. See vv. 836, 926, above.

[2] There is no horrible inconsistency here such as the critics strive and cry about. In spite of the ruin that Grendel and Beowulf had made within the hall, the framework and roof held firm, and swift repairs made the interior habitable. Tapestries were hung on the walls, and willing hands prepared the banquet.

of life despairing. — No light thing that,[1]
the flight for safety, — essay it who will!
Forced of fate, he shall find his way
to the refuge ready for race of man,
for soul-possessors, and sons of earth;
and there his body on bed of death
shall rest after revel.
Arrived was the hour
when to hall proceeded Healfdene's son:
the king himself would sit to banquet.
Ne'er heard I of host in haughtier throng
more graciously gathered round giver-of-rings!
Bowed then to bench those bearers-of-glory,
fain of the feasting. Featly received
many a mead-cup the mighty-in-spirit,
kinsmen who sat in the sumptuous hall,
Hrothgar and Hrothulf.[2] Heorot now
was filled with friends; the folk of Scyldings
ne'er yet had tried the traitor's deed.
To Beowulf gave the bairn of Healfdene
a gold-wove banner, guerdon of triumph,
broidered battle-flag, breastplate and helmet;
and a splendid sword was seen of many
borne to the brave one. Beowulf took
cup in hall:[3] for such costly gifts

[1] The usual litotes for "impossible." So, v. 1027, below, "few" means "none at all." — As for the matter, a moral commonplace is not very happily forced into the narrative.

[2] Uncle and nephew. It would seem that after a long period of amity (cf. *Widsith*, 45) they quarrelled and fought. See also below, v. 1164.

[3] From its formal use in other places, this phrase, to take cup in hall, or "on the floor," would seem to mean that Beowulf stood up to receive his gifts, drink to the donor, and say thanks.

he suffered no shame in that soldier throng.[1]
For I heard of few heroes, in heartier mood,
with four such gifts, so fashioned with gold,
on the ale-bench honoring others thus!
O'er the roof of the helmet high, a ridge,
wound with wires, kept ward o'er the head,
lest the relict-of-files[2] should fierce invade,
sharp in the strife, when that shielded hero
should go to grapple against his foes.
Then the earls'-defence[3] on the floor[4] bade lead
coursers eight, with carven head-gear,
adown the hall: one horse was decked
with a saddle all shining and set in jewels;
'twas the battle-seat of the best of kings,
when to play of swords the son of Healfdene
was fain to fare. Ne'er failed his valor
in the crush of combat when corpses fell.
To Beowulf over them both then gave
the refuge-of-Ingwines right and power,
o'er war-steeds and weapons: wished him joy of them.
Manfully thus the mighty prince,
hoard-guard for heroes, that hard fight repaid
with steeds and treasures contemned by none
who is willing to say the sooth aright.

[1] The *comitatus*; the *soldurii*.

[2] Kenning for sword. Charles Lamb ("On the Inconvenience Resulting from being Hanged") calls a resuscitated man "the leavings of the rope."

[3] Hrothgar. He is also the "refuge of the friends of Ing," of v. 1044. Ing belongs to myth.

[4] Horses are frequently led or ridden into the hall where folk sit at banquet: so in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, in the ballad of *King Estmere*, and in the romances.

XVI

And the lord of earls, to each that came
with Beowulf over the briny ways,
an heirloom there at the ale-bench gave,
precious gift; and the price [1] bade pay
in gold for him whom Grendel erst
murdered, — and fain of them more had killed,
had not wisest God their Wyrd averted,
and the man's [2] brave mood. The Maker then
ruled human kind, as here and now.
Therefore is insight always best,
and forethought of mind. How much awaits him
of lief and of loath, who long time here,
through days of warfare this world endures!

Then song and music mingled sounds
in the presence of Healfdene's head-of-armies [3]
and harping was heard with the hero-lay [4]
as Hrothgar's singer the hall-joy woke
along the mead-seats, making his song
of that sudden raid on the sons of Finn.[5]
Healfdene's hero, Hnæf the Scylding,
was fated to fall in the Frisian slaughter.[6]

[1] Man-price, *wergild.*

[2] Beowulf's. The same combination of fate and courage as above, v. 573.

[3] Hrothgar.

[4] Literally, "*glee-wood* was greeted (stirred, touched) and lay was sung."

[5] There is no need to assume a gap in the *Ms.* As before about Sigemund and Heremod, so now, though at greater length, about Finn and his feud, a lay is chanted or recited; and the epic poet, counting on his readers' familiarity with the story, — a fragment of it still exists, and is printed in this volume, — simply gives the headings.

[6] The exact story to which this episode refers in summary is not to be determined, but the following account of it is reasonable and has good

Hildeburh needed not hold in value
her enemies' honor![1] Innocent both
were the loved ones she lost at the linden-play,
bairn and brother; they bowed to fate,
stricken by spears; 'twas a sorrowful woman!
None doubted why the daughter of Hoc
bewailed her doom when dawning came,
and under the sky she saw them lying,
kinsmen murdered, where most she had kenned
of the sweets of the world! By war were swept, too,

support among scholars. Finn, a Frisian chieftain, who nevertheless has a "castle" outside the Frisian border, marries Hildeburh, a Danish princess; and her brother, Hnæf, with many other Danes, pays Finn a visit. Relations between the two peoples have been strained before. Something starts the old feud anew; and the visitors are attacked in their quarters. Hnæf is killed; so is a son of Hildeburh. Many fall on both sides. Peace is patched up; a stately funeral is held; and the surviving visitors become in a way vassals or liegemen of Finn, going back with him to Frisia. So matters rest a while. Hengest is now leader of the Danes; but he is set upon revenge for his former lord, Hnæf. Probably he is killed in feud; but his clansmen, Guthlaf and Oslaf, gather at their home a force of sturdy Danes, come back to Frisia, storm Finn's stronghold, kill him, and carry back their kinswoman Hildeburh. The Finnsburg fragment, translated below, describes (so Bugge puts it, conforming, as he says, "to the common view") the fight in which Hnæf fell, "that is to say, an event which precedes the story told in the *Beowulf*," and is noted in these introductory lines (vv. 1069 f.). — In the *Widsith*, Hnæf is called ruler of the Hocings. — In v. 1142 it is assumed that Hengest is killed by the sword "Lafing" of a Frisian named Hun. In *Widsith*, v. 33, Hun ruled the Hætweras, a tribe of Franks now apparently subject to Finn the Frisian. Another reading makes Finn slay Hengest with a sword "Hunlafing." Two other interpretations make either Finn lay this sword "Hunlafing," or Hun lay "Lafing," on Hengest's lap, as a gift and a sign of allegiance on the part of the receiver. Of course, in this case, Hengest dissembles his real feelings to gain time and opportunity for the subsequent invasion.

[1] Usual litotes; she had good cause to complain. The "enemies" must be the Frisians; the original word is "eotens," "ettins," monsters; but it is elsewhere used in speaking of Frisian men.

Finn's own liegemen, and few were left;
in the parleying-place [1] he could ply no longer
weapon, nor war could he wage on Hengest,
and rescue his remnant by right of arms
from the prince's thane. A pact he offered:
another dwelling the Danes should have,
hall and high-seat, and half the power
should fall to them in Frisian land;
and at the fee-gifts, Folcwald's son
day by day the Danes should honor,
the folk of Hengest favor with rings,
even as truly, with treasure and jewels,
with fretted gold, as his Frisian kin
he meant to honor in ale-hall there.
Pact of peace they plighted further
on both sides firmly. Finn to Hengest
with oath, upon honor, openly promised
that woful remnant, with wise-men's aid,
nobly to govern, so none of the guests
by word or work should warp the treaty,[2]
or with malice of mind bemoan themselves
as forced to follow their fee-giver's slayer,
lordless men, as their lot ordained.
Should Frisian, moreover, with foeman's taunt,
that murderous hatred to mind recall,

[1] Battlefield. — Hengest is the "prince's thane," companion of Hnæf. "Folcwald's son" is Finn.

[2] That is, Finn would govern in all honor the few Danish warriors who were left, provided, of course, that none of them tried to renew the quarrel or avenge Hnæf their fallen lord. If, again, one of Finn's Frisians began a quarrel, he should die by the sword. "With wise-men's aid" is like the form familiar in Ælfred's Laws. "With the advice of my Witan, I order. . . ."

then edge of the sword must seal his doom.
Oaths were given, and ancient gold
heaped from hoard. — The hardy Scylding,
battle-thane best,[1] on his balefire lay.
All on the pyre were plain to see
the gory sark, the gilded swine-crest,
boar of hard iron, and athelings many
slain by the sword: at the slaughter they fell.
It was Hildeburh's hest, at Hnæf's own pyre
the bairn of her body on brands to lay,
his bones to burn, on the balefire placed,
at his uncle's side.[2] In sorrowful dirges
bewept them the woman: great wailing ascended.[3]
Then wound up to welkin the wildest of death-fires,
roared o'er the hillock:[4] heads all were melted,

[1] Hnæf.

[2] This reading, which involves a very slight change, was proposed by Holthausen, and is followed by Gering in his German translation. The clash of kin-duties is the deep note in Germanic tragedy: to emphasize the fact that here lay the hero, and by him his sister's son, — the dearest of relationships, — opposed in fight and united in death, was clear privilege for the poet; and the dirge of the mother and sister doubtless dwelt chiefly on the tragic intensity of the double loss.

[3] Reading *gūthrinc* = *gūthhring*, "noise of battle," with Grein. It could easily be used for the lamentation of a great multitude. — For the previous passage, if the old reading is retained, a period should follow "placed" (v. 1116), and the next line would be:

> Sad by his shoulder sorrowed the woman,
> wept him with dirges: great wailing ascended. . . .

This *vocero* or lament of the widow, as in the case of Beowulf, v. 3150, below, was accompanied by choral wailing of the throng. In the *Iliad*, at the funeral of Hector: "Thus spake she wailing and therewith the great multitude of the people groaned." — "Thus spake she wailing and stirred unending moan. . . ."

[4] The high place chosen for the funeral: see description of Beowulf's funeral-pile at the end of the poem.

gashes burst, and blood gushed out
from bites[1] of the body. Balefire devoured,
greediest spirit, those spared not by war
out of either folk: their flower was gone.

XVII

Then hastened those heroes their home to see,
friendless, to find the Frisian land,
houses and high burg. Hengest still
through the death-dyed winter dwelt with Finn,
holding pact, yet of home he minded,
though powerless his ring-decked prow to drive
over the waters, now waves rolled fierce
lashed by the winds, or winter locked them
in icy fetters. Then fared[2] another
year to men's dwellings, as yet they do,
the sunbright skies, that their season ever
duly await. Far off winter was driven;
fair lay earth's breast; and fain was the rover,
the guest, to depart, though more gladly he pondered
on wreaking his vengeance than roaming the deep,
and how to hasten the hot encounter
where sons of the Frisians were sure to be.
So he escaped not the common doom,[3]
when Hun with "Lafing," the light-of-battle,
best of blades, his bosom pierced:
its edge was famed with the Frisian earls.

[1] Wounds.

[2] A touch of myth lingers in this personification of the seasons. Compare the pretty lyric "Lenten is comen with love to toune," where "toune," like "men's dwellings" in the text, means no definite place, but the whole district in question "where folk live." Of course, spring then brought the new year.

[3] See conclusion of note to v. 1070.

On fierce-heart Finn there fell likewise,
on himself at home, the horrid sword-death ;
for Guthlaf and Oslaf of grim attack
had sorrowing told, from sea-ways landed,
mourning their woes.[1] Finn's wavering spirit
bode not in breast. The burg was reddened
with blood of foemen, and Finn was slain,
king amid clansmen; the queen was taken.
To their ship the Scylding warriors bore
all the chattels the chieftain owned,
whatever they found in Finn's domain
of gems and jewels. The gentle wife
o'er paths of the deep to the Danes they bore,
led to her land.
The lay was finished,
the gleeman's song. Then glad rose the revel;
bench-joy brightened. Bearers draw
from their "wonder-vats" wine. Comes Wealhtheow forth,
under gold-crown [2] goes where the good pair sit,
uncle and nephew, true each to the other one,
kindred in amity. Unferth the spokesman
at the Scylding lord's feet sat: men had faith in his spirit,
his keenness of courage, though kinsmen had found him

[1] That is, these two Danes, escaping home, had told the story of the attack on Hnæf, the slaying of Hengest, and all the Danish woes. Collecting a force, they return to Frisia and kill Finn in his home. To this attack some writers refer the fragment of *Finnsburg*.

[2] So men go "hardy under helmet." — The following lines are of unusual length, and are so rendered. The uncle and nephew are Hrothgar and Hrothulf. See above, v. 1017, and below, vv. 1180 f.

unsure at the sword-play. The Scylding queen spoke:
"Quaff of this cup, my king and lord,
breaker of rings, and blithe be thou,
gold-friend of men; to the Geats here speak
such words of mildness as man should use.
Be glad with thy Geats;[1] of those gifts be mindful,
or near or far, which now thou hast.
Men say to me, as son thou wishest
yon hero to hold. Thy Heorot purged,
jewel-hall brightest, enjoy while thou canst,
with many a largess; and leave to thy kin
folk and realm when forth thou goest
to greet thy doom. For gracious I deem
my Hrothulf,[2] willing to hold and rule
nobly our youths, if thou yield up first,
prince of Scyldings, thy part in the world.
I ween with good he will well requite
offspring of ours, when all he minds
that for him we did in his helpless days
of gift and grace to gain him honor!"
Then she turned to the seat where her sons were placed,
Hrethric and Hrothmund, with heroes' bairns,

[1] Emended by some editors to "guests." Neither reading combines satisfactorily with the context.

[2] Nephew to Hrothgar, with whom he subsequently quarrels, and elder cousin to the two young sons of Hrothgar and Wealhtheow, — their natural guardian in the event of the king's death. There is something finely feminine in this speech of Wealhtheow's, apart from its somewhat irregular and irrelevant sequence of topics. Both she and her lord probably distrust Hrothulf; but she bids the king to be of good cheer, and, turning to the suspect, heaps affectionate assurances on his probity. "My own Hrothulf" will surely not forget those favors and benefits of the past, but will repay them to the orphaned boy.

young men together : the Geat, too, sat there,
Beowulf brave, the brothers between.

XVIII

A cup she gave him, with kindly greeting
and winsome words. Of wounden gold,
she offered, to honor him, arm-jewels twain,
corselet and rings, and of collars the noblest
that ever I knew the earth around.
Ne'er heard I so mighty, 'neath heaven's dome,
a hoard-gem of heroes, since Hama bore
to his bright-built burg the Brisings' necklace,[1]
jewel and gem casket. — Jealousy fled he,
Eormenric's hate : chose help eternal.[2]
Hygelac Geat,[3] grandson of Swerting,
on the last of his raids this ring bore with him,
under his banner the booty defending,
the war-spoil warding; but Wyrd o'erwhelmed him
what time, in his daring, dangers he sought,
feud with Frisians. Fairest of gems

[1] Legend and myth are interwoven in this allusion, but the Brisings' (Brosings' in our *Ms.*) necklace by this time had probably sunk to a sort of celestial standard of value in jewelry, a traditional phrase, and the myth — preserved in part by Scandinavian stories — of the wonderful ornament of the goddess Freyja had quite lost its vitality in epic verse. For Eormanric, see the allusion in *Deor's Song*, below. Hama is Heime in the Germanic legend.

[2] Usually this means that "he died"; but Bugge, translating "he went into God's refuge," and relying on a late form of the legend, thinks we are to understand that Hama retired from the world into a monastery.

[3] The poet now tells the fate of this gift of Wealhtheow. Beowulf gives it to his lord Hygelac, who wears it on his fated raid into Frisian lands, — the historical event which took place between 512 and 520 A.D. Theudebert, grandson of Clovis the Frankish king, surprised and slew Hygelac, captured his fleet and the booty, and took many prisoners. — See also vv. 2355, 2914.

he bore with him over the beaker-of-waves,
sovran strong : under shield he died.
Fell the corpse of the king into keeping of Franks,
gear of the breast, and that gorgeous ring ;
weaker warriors won the spoil,
after gripe of battle, from Geatland's lord,[1]
and held the death-field.
Din rose in hall.
Wealhtheow spake amid warriors, and said:—
" This jewel enjoy in thy jocund youth,
Beowulf lov'd, these battle-weeds wear,
a royal treasure, and richly thrive !
Preserve thy strength, and these striplings here
counsel in kindness : requital be mine.
Hast done such deeds, that for days to come
thou art famed among folk both far and near,
so wide as washeth the wave of Ocean
his windy walls. Through the ways of life
prosper, O prince ! I pray for thee
rich possessions.[2] To son of mine

[1] Tradition told of Hygelac's enormous size and strength. A certain *Liber Monstrorum*, perhaps of the seventh century, cites *rex Hugilaicus*, who ruled the *Getae* and was killed by the Franks, as one whom no horse could carry since he was twelve years old, and whose enormous skeleton was still on an island near the mouth of the Rhine. Moreover, this friendly account would attribute the defeat to surprise by an overwhelmingly superior force. — Quite in accord with the usual construction of epic narrative in old English verse, and with the same structure in little as shown by the parallels and variations of the sentence or period, the poet returns to the scene in the hall. " Din rose in the hall " has been emended to " din ceased," or " warriors listened," but vainly ; the usual applause goes up as the gifts are handed to the hero, and then silence falls as the queen speaks.

[2] Or, perhaps, " thou art heartily welcome to these treasures I have given thee," as Gering translates.

be helpful in deed and uphold his joys!
Here every earl to the other is true,
mild of mood, to the master loyal!
Thanes are friendly, the throng obedient,
liegemen are revelling: list and obey!"[1]
Went then to her place. — That was proudest of feasts;
flowed wine for the warriors. Wyrd they knew not,
destiny dire, and the doom to be seen
by many an earl[2] when eve should come,
and Hrothgar homeward hasten away,
royal, to rest. The room was guarded
by an army of earls, as erst was done.
They bared the bench-boards; abroad they spread
beds and bolsters. — One beer-carouser
in danger of doom[3] lay down in the hall. —
At their heads they set their shields of war,
bucklers bright; on the bench were there
over each atheling, easy to see,
the high battle-helmet, the haughty spear,
the corselet of rings. 'Twas their custom so
ever to be for battle prepared,
at home, or harrying, which it were,
even as oft as evil threatened
their sovran king. — They were clansmen good.[4]

[1] Literally, "Do as I bid."

[2] Litotes for "all." The fatal stroke hovered over them all, though only one was actually stricken.

[3] Literally, "ready to go [*sc.* to death], and fey," on the verge of death, and a marked man.

[4] The Gnomic poetry of the Exeter Ms., 178 ff., describes, in what may be stanzaic verse, how clansmen or *comites* ought to live in fellowship, and especially that they should sleep under one roof, remaining a united band by night as well as by day:

XIX

Then sank they to sleep. With sorrow one bought
his rest of the evening, — as ofttime had happened
when Grendel guarded that golden hall,
evil wrought, till his end drew nigh,
slaughter for sins. 'Twas seen and told
how an avenger survived the fiend,
as was learned afar. The livelong time [1]
after that grim fight, Grendel's mother,
monster of women, mourned her woe.
She was doomed to dwell in the dreary waters,
cold sea-courses, since Cain cut down
with edge of the sword his only brother,
his father's offspring : outlawed he fled,
marked with murder, from men's delights,
warded the wilds. — There woke from him [2]
such fate-sent ghosts as Grendel, who,
war-wolf horrid, at Heorot found
a warrior watching and waiting the fray,
with whom the grisly one grappled amain.
But the man remembered his mighty power,
the glorious gift that God had sent him,

Ever must heroes in harmony live,
in the same place sleeping;
So that never shall man of man speak ill
till death undo them!

Compare vv. 1228 ff., above. For the matter of the stanzaic form see *Signy's Lament*, translated below in the introduction to *Deor's Song*.

[1] Müllenhoff so punctuates, and explains that though only twenty-four hours had passed from the time of Grendel's discomfiture to her quest of revenge, the interval seemed interminable to the waiting monster. Moreover, by this reading no gap in the *Ms.* is assumed.

[2] See v. 107, above. — "From him are descended," etc. This repetition certainly seems vain, and this way of narrative is not our way.

in his Maker's mercy put his trust
for comfort and help: so he conquered the foe,
felled the fiend, who fled abject,
reft of joy, to the realms of death,
mankind's foe. And his mother now,
gloomy and grim, would go that quest
of sorrow, the death of her son to avenge.
To Heorot came she, where helmeted Danes
slept in the hall. Too soon came back
old ills of the earls, when in she burst,
the mother of Grendel. Less grim, though, that terror,
e'en as terror of woman in war is less,
might of maid, than of men in arms
when, hammer-forgéd, the falchion hard,
sword gore-stained, through swine of the helm,
crested, with keen blade carves amain.
Then was in hall the hard-edge drawn,
the swords on the settles,[1] and shields a-many
firm held in hand: nor helmet minded
nor harness of mail, whom that horror seized.
Haste was hers; she would hie afar
and save her life when the liegemen saw her.
Yet a single atheling up she seized
fast and firm, as she fled to the moor.
He was for Hrothgar of heroes the dearest,
of trusty vassals betwixt the seas,
whom she killed on his couch, a clansman famous,
in battle brave. — Nor was Beowulf there;
another house had been held apart,
after giving of gold, for the Geat renowned. —

[1] They had laid their arms on the benches near where they slept; v. 1242.

Uproar filled Heorot ; the hand all had viewed,
blood-flecked, she bore with her ; bale was returned,
dole in the dwellings : 'twas dire exchange
where Dane and Geat were doomed to give
the lives of loved ones. Long-tried king,
the hoary hero, at heart was sad
when he knew his noble no more lived,
and dead indeed was his dearest thane.
To his bower was Beowulf brought in haste,
dauntless victor. As daylight broke,
along with his earls the atheling lord,
with his clansmen, came, where the king abode
waiting to see if the Wielder-of-All
would turn this tale of trouble and woe.
Strode o'er floor the famed-in-strife,
with his hand-companions, — the hall resounded, —
wishing to greet the wise old king,
Ingwines' lord ; he asked if the night
had passed in peace to the prince's mind.

XX

Hrothgar spake, helmet-of-Scyldings : —
" Ask not of pleasure ! Pain is renewed
to Danish folk. Dead is Æschere,
of Yrmenlaf the elder brother,
my sage adviser and stay in council,
shoulder-comrade [1] in stress of fight
when warriors clashed and we warded our heads,

[1] *Eaxl-gestealla*, "shoulder-comrade," here refers to the line of battle ; but it might include the other qualities of advice and counsel. Dan Michel in his fourteenth century translation or paraphrase, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, calls a councillor *bezide-zittere*, "beside-sitter."

hewed the helm-boars: hero famed
should be every earl as Æschere was!
But here in Heorot a hand hath slain him
of wandering death-sprite. I wot not whither,[1]
proud of the prey, her path she took,
fain of her fill. The feud she avenged
that yesternight, unyieldingly,
Grendel in grimmest grasp thou killedst, —
seeing how long these liegemen mine
he ruined and ravaged. Reft of life,
in arms he fell. Now another comes,
keen and cruel, her kin to avenge,
faring far in feud of blood:
so that many a thane shall think, who e'er
sorrows in soul for that sharer of rings,
this is hardest of heart-bales. The hand lies low
that once was willing each wish to please.
Land-dwellers here[2] and liegemen mine,
who house by those parts,[3] I have heard relate
that such a pair they have sometimes seen,
march-stalkers mighty the moorland haunting,
wandering spirits: one of them seemed,
so far as my folk could fairly judge,
of womankind; and one, accursed,
in man's guise trod the misery-track

[1] He surmises presently where she is.

[2] The connection is not difficult. The words of mourning, of acute grief, are said; and according to Germanic sequence of thought, inexorable here, the next and only topic is revenge. But is it possible? Hrothgar leads up to his appeal and promise with a skilful and often effective description of the horrors which surround the monster's home and await the attempt of an avenging foe. This account is not the thing of shreds and patches which Müllenhoff and ten Brink would make it out.

[3] Following Gering's suggestion.

of exile, though huger than human bulk.
Grendel in days long gone they named him,
folk of the land; his father they knew not,
nor any brood that was born to him
of treacherous spirits. Untrod is their home;[1]
by wolf-cliffs haunt they and windy headlands,
fenways fearful, where flows the stream
from mountains gliding to gloom of the rocks,
underground flood.[2] Not far is it hence

[1] R. Morris pointed out what seems an imitation of this passage in the Blickling Homilies.

[2] Compare *Kubla Khan*: —

> "Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man,
> Down to a sunless sea."

It is worth while to compare with this passage another deliberate nature-description in Anglo-Saxon verse, and its Latin model as well. One sees how it is modified, enlarged, and really improved. It is the opening of a little poem on *Doomsday* paraphrased from Latin verses attributed to Beda, — and also to Alcuin.

> Alone I sat in the shade of a grove,
> in the deeps of the holt, bedecked with shadows,
> there where the waterbrooks wavered and ran
> in the midst of the place, — so I make my song, —
> and winsome blooms there waxed and blossomed,
> all massed amid a meadow peerless.
> And the trees of the forest trembled and murmured
> for a horror of winds, and the welkin was stirred,
> and my heavy heart was harassed amain.
> Then I suddenly, sad and fearful,
> set me to sing this sorrowful verse. . . .

This represents five lines of Latin: —

> Inter florigeras fecundi cespitis herbas,
> flamine ventorum resonantibus undique ramis,
> arboris umbriferae maestus sub tegmine solus
> dum sedi, subito planctu turbatus amaro,
> carmina prae tristi cecini haec lugubria mente. . . .

It is no long stride hence to the conventional dream-poets, and such openings as are offered by the beginning of the *Piers Plowman* vision.

in measure of miles that the mere expands,
and o'er it the frost-bound forest hanging,
sturdily rooted, shadows the wave.
By night is a wonder weird to see,
fire on the waters. So wise lived none
of the sons of men, to search those depths!
Nay, though the heath-rover,[1] harried by dogs,
the horn-proud hart, this holt should seek,
long distance driven, his dear life first
on the brink he yields ere he brave the plunge
to hide his head: 'tis no happy place!
Thence the welter of waters washes up
wan to welkin when winds bestir
evil storms, and air grows dusk,
and the heavens weep. Now is help once more
with thee alone! The land thou knowst not,[2]
place of fear, where thou findest out
that sin-flecked being. Seek if thou dare!
I will reward thee, for waging this fight,
with ancient treasure, as erst I did,
with winding gold, if thou winnest back."

[1] Bugge has shown how popular the stag or hart was among the northern folk for names of persons and places — so Hrothgar's own hall *Heorot*, or "The Hart" — and for comparisons and the like. — There is a curious note by André Chénier, made in preparation for one of his poems (*Œuvres Poétiques*, II, 107), about a white animal that prefers to be torn to pieces rather than soil itself by rescue in a miry swamp. But the strength of the present suggestion lies in its uncompromising contrast of terrors, one with the other.

[2] Has been emended to read: "the land now thou knowst," that is, "I have described the place: go thither if you dare." By the text one understands: "Here is land unknown to you and horrible. If you dare, etc."

XXI

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow :
"Sorrow not, sage! It beseems us better
friends to avenge than fruitlessly mourn them.
Each of us all must his end abide
in the ways of the world; so win who may
glory ere death! When his days are told,
that is the warrior's worthiest doom.
Rise, O realm-warder! Ride we anon,
and mark the trail of the mother of Grendel.
No harbor shall hide her — heed my promise! —
enfolding of field or forested mountain
or floor of the flood, let her flee where she will!
But thou this day endure in patience,
as I ween thou wilt, thy woes each one."
Leaped up the graybeard: God he thanked,
mighty Lord, for the man's brave words.
For Hrothgar soon a horse was saddled
wave-maned steed. The sovran wise
stately rode on; his shield-armed men
followed in force. The footprints led
along the woodland, widely seen,
a path o'er the plain, where she passed, and trod
the murky moor; of men-at-arms
she bore the bravest and best one, dead,
him who with Hrothgar the homestead ruled.
On then went the atheling-born
o'er stone-cliffs steep and strait defiles,
narrow passes and unknown ways,
headlands sheer, and the haunts of the Nicors.
Foremost he[1] fared, a few at his side

[1] Hrothgar is probably meant.

of the wiser men, the ways to scan,
till he found in a flash the forested hill
hanging over the hoary rock,
a woful wood: the waves below
were dyed in blood. The Danish men
had sorrow of soul, and for Scyldings all,
for many a hero, 'twas hard to bear,
ill for earls, when Æschere's head
they found by the flood on the foreland there.
Waves were welling, the warriors saw,
hot with blood; but the horn sang oft
battle-song bold. The band sat down,
and watched on the water worm-like things,
sea-dragons strange that sounded the deep,
and nicors that lay on the ledge of the ness —
such as oft essay at hour of morn [1]
on the road-of-sails their ruthless quest, —
and sea-snakes and monsters. These started away,
swollen and savage that song to hear,
that war-horn's blast. The warden of Geats,
with bolt from bow, then balked of life,
of wave-work, one monster; amid its heart
went the keen war-shaft; in water it seemed
less doughty in swimming whom death had seized.
Swift on the billows, with boar-spears well
hooked and barbed, it was hard beset,
done to death and dragged on the headland,
wave-roamer wondrous. Warriors viewed
the grisly guest.

Then girt him Beowulf
in martial mail, nor mourned for his life.

[1] Noon? "Mittagsstunde, Geisterstunde."

His breastplate broad and bright of hues,
woven by hand, should the waters try;
well could it ward the warrior's body
that battle should break on his breast in vain
nor harm his heart by the hand of a foe.
And the helmet white that his head protected
was destined to dare the deeps of the flood,
through wave-whirl win: 'twas wound with chains,
decked with gold, as in days of yore
the weapon-smith worked it wondrously,
with swine-forms set it, that swords nowise,
brandished in battle, could bite that helm.
Nor was that the meanest of mighty helps
which Hrothgar's orator[1] offered at need:
"Hrunting" they named the hilted sword,
of old-time heirlooms easily first;
iron was its edge, all etched with poison,
with battle-blood hardened, nor blenched it at fight
in hero's hand who held it ever,
on paths of peril prepared to go
to folkstead[2] of foes. Not first time this

[1] Unferth is the *thyle* (spokesman?) of the king. Naming a sword furnished the least of its personal attributes in Germanic days. It had its moods and tenses; "refused" often "to bite" (1523, 2578), or else, on appeal, did miraculous service. It spoke, sang, chided its inactive owner, spurred even to his duty, as in a fine Danish ballad. It had its own name, — Hrunting, Nægling. It had kennings in plenty, — such as the "warrior's friend" or "friend of war," vv. 1810, 2735. It gave out a light, which is not always to be euhemerized into the sparks that flew from it in battle. The reference in 1459 is to the hardening process of dipping it in poison, snake's blood, or the like. "Blood of battle" was especially efficacious for this purpose. On the other side of the account, it could be made harmless by certain magic forms. So Beowulf finds, even with this *Hrunting* or "thruster"; see v. 1522.

[2] Meeting-place. "Destined" is, in view of the issue, to be understood as "expected," — it had been sent on other capital errands before.

it was destined to do a daring task.
For he bore not in mind, the bairn of Ecglaf
sturdy and strong, that speech he had made,
drunk with wine, now this weapon he lent
to a stouter swordsman. Himself, though, durst not
under welter of waters wager his life
as loyal liegeman. So lost he his glory,
honor of earls. With the other not so,
who girded him now for the grim encounter.

XXII

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow :—
"Have mind, thou honored offspring of Healfdene,
gold-friend of men, now I go on this quest,
sovran wise, what once was said :
if in thy cause it came that I
should lose my life, thou wouldst loyal bide
to me, though fallen, in father's place!
Be guardian, thou, to this group of my thanes,
my warrior-friends, if War should seize me ;
and the goodly gifts thou gavest me,
Hrothgar beloved, to Hygelac send! [1]
Geatland's king may ken by the gold,
Hrethel's son see, when he stares at the treasure,
that I got me a friend for goodness famed,
and joyed while I could in my jewel-bestower.
And let Unferth wield this wondrous sword,[2]
earl far-honored, this heirloom precious,

[1] "Discharge for me," that is, "my two great obligations : care for my thanes, and the rendering to my lord of what I have won by my prowess," — good Germanic ethics.

[2] The sword which Hrothgar gave to Beowulf? Or Beowulf's own sword which he brought with him?

hard of edge : with Hrunting I
seek doom of glory, or Death shall take me."

After these words the Weder-Geat lord
boldly hastened, biding never
answer at all : and ocean floods
closed o'er the hero. Long while [1] of the day
fled ere he felt the floor of the sea.
Soon found the fiend who the flood-domain
sword-hungry held these hundred winters,
greedy and grim, that some guest from above,
some man, was raiding her monster-realm.
She grasped out for him with grisly claws,[2]
and the warrior seized; yet scathed she not
his body hale; the breastplate hindered,
as she strove to shatter the sark of war,
the linkéd harness, with loathsome hand.
Then bore this brine-wolf, when bottom she [3] touched,
the lord of rings to the lair she haunted,
whiles vainly he strove, though his valor held,
weapon to wield against wondrous monsters
that sore beset him ; sea-beasts many
tried with fierce tusks to tear his mail,
and swarmed on the stranger. But soon he marked
he was now in some hall, he knew not which,
where water never could work him harm,
nor through the roof could reach him ever
fangs of the flood. Firelight he saw,
beams of a blaze that brightly shone.

[1] "An hour of the day," — Müllenhoff. Others translate : "the space of a whole day."

[2] In the saga of Orm and Grettir, it is a cat-monster with which the hero fights.

[3] Or "he" ?

Then[1] the warrior was ware of that wolf-of-the-deep,
mere-wife monstrous. For mighty stroke
he swung his blade, and the blow withheld not.
Then sang on her head that seemly blade
its war-song wild. But the warrior found
the light-of-battle[2] was loath to bite,
to harm the heart: its hard edge failed
the noble at need, yet had known of old
strife hand to hand, and had helmets cloven,
doomed men's fighting-gear. First time, this,
for the gleaming blade that its glory fell.
Firm still stood, nor failed in valor,
heedful of high deeds, Hygelac's kinsman;
flung away fretted sword, featly jewelled,
the angry earl; on earth it lay
steel-edged and stiff. His strength he trusted,
hand-gripe of might. So man shall do
whenever in war he weens to earn him
lasting fame, nor fears for his life!
Seized then by shoulder,[3] shrank not from combat,
the Geatish war-prince Grendel's mother.
Flung then the fierce one, filled with wrath,

[1] Discrepancies here vex the higher critic; but they are simply somewhat exaggerated traits of structure and style. The course of the action is not "hopelessly confused." Beowulf, overwhelmed by the first onset of Grendel's mother, is dragged to her lair, and on the way is beset by monsters of every kind. Managing to extricate himself from the coil, he finds he is in a great arched hall, free of the water, and has only the mother of Grendel before him. He takes good heed of her and prepares his attack.

[2] Kenning for "sword." Hrunting is bewitched, laid under a spell of uselessness, along with all other swords. See note above to v. 1455.

[3] Changed by many editions to "hair." The two sentences here with "then" in each show well the dissected style of our old epic verse.

his deadly foe, that she fell to ground.
Swift on her part she paid him back
with grisly grasp, and grappled with him.
Spent with struggle, stumbled the warrior,
fiercest of fighting-men, fell adown.
On the hall-guest she hurled herself, hent her short sword,
broad and brown-edged,[1] the bairn to avenge,
the sole-born son. — On his shoulder lay
braided breast-mail, barring death,
withstanding entrance of edge or blade.
Life would have ended for Ecgtheow's son,
under wide earth for that earl of Geats,
had his armor of war not aided him,
battle-net hard, and holy God
wielded the victory, wisest Maker.
The Lord of Heaven allowed his cause;
and easily rose the earl erect.

XXIII

'Mid the battle-gear saw he a blade triumphant,
old-sword of Eotens, with edge of proof,
warriors' heirloom, weapon unmatched,
— save only 'twas more than other men
to bandy-of-battle could bear at all —
as the giants had wrought it, ready and keen.
Seized then its chain-hilt the Scyldings' champion,
bold and battle-grim, brandished the sword,
reckless of life, and so wrathfully smote

[1] This brown of swords, evidently meaning burnished, bright, continues to be a favorite adjective in the popular ballads.

that it gripped her neck and grasped her hard,
her bone-rings breaking: the blade pierced through
that fated-one's flesh: to floor she sank.
Bloody the blade: he was blithe of his deed.
Then blazed forth light. 'Twas bright within
as when from the sky there shines unclouded
heaven's candle. The hall he scanned.
By the wall then went he; his weapon raised
high by its hilts the Hygelac-thane,
angry and eager. That edge was not useless
to the warrior now. He wished with speed
Grendel to guerdon for grim raids many,
for the war he waged on Western-Danes
oftener far than an only time,[1]
when of Hrothgar's hearth-companions
he slew in slumber, in sleep devoured,
fifteen men of the folk of Danes,
and as many others outward bore,
his horrible prey. Well paid for that
the wrathful prince! For now prone he saw
Grendel stretched there, spent with war,
spoiled of life, so scathed had left him
Heorot's battle. The body sprang far
when after death it endured the blow,
sword-stroke savage, that severed its head.

[1] This belittling variation of the "many raids" just mentioned, the solemnity of the favorite litotes, give an enfeebled air to modern English. True is, ancient English had other views of poetical style than ours. — The long parenthesis, too, while Beowulf's sword is uplifted over the dead Grendel, is not to present taste. — The cutting off of the head, as Gering suggests, is to prevent Grendel from visiting his old haunts as a ghost and stirring up new troubles. He could not be harmed by ordinary swords, as all were conjured; but this old giant blade of the monsters has no spell laid on it.

Soon,[1] then, saw the sage companions
who waited with Hrothgar, watching the flood,
that the tossing waters turbid grew,
blood-stained the mere. Old men together,
hoary-haired, of the hero spake;
the warrior would not, they weened, again,
proud of conquest, come to seek
their mighty master. To many it seemed
the wolf-of-the-waves had won his life.
The ninth hour[2] came. The noble Scyldings
left the headland; homeward went
the gold-friend of men.[3] But the guests sat on,
stared at the surges, sick in heart,
and wished, yet weened not, their winsome lord
again to see.

Now that sword began,
from blood of the fight, in battle-droppings,[4]
war-blade, to wane: 'twas a wondrous thing
that all of it melted as ice is wont
when frosty fetters the Father loosens,
unwinds the wave-bonds, wielding all
seasons and times: the true God he!

Nor took from that dwelling the duke of the Geats
precious things, though a plenty he saw,
save only the head and that hilt withal
blazoned with jewels: the blade had melted,
burned was the bright sword, her blood was so hot,

[1] After the killing of the monster and Grendel's decapitation.

[2] Strictly this would be three o'clock in the afternoon; but the close of the day, perhaps the shorter northern day in winter, seems indicated. Gering translates "evening."

[3] Hrothgar.

[4] The blade slowly dissolves in blood-stained drops like icicles.

so poisoned the hell-sprite who perished within there.
Soon he was swimming who safe saw in combat
downfall of demons; up-dove through the flood.
The clashing waters were cleansed now,
waste of waves, where the wandering fiend
her life-days left and this lapsing world.
Swam then to strand the sailors'-refuge,
sturdy-in-spirit, of sea-booty glad,
of burden brave he bore with him.
Went then to greet him, and God they thanked,
the thane-band choice of their chieftain blithe,
that safe and sound they could see him again.
Soon from the hardy one helmet and armor
deftly they doffed: now drowsed the mere,
water 'neath welkin, with war-blood stained.
Forth they fared by the footpaths thence,
merry at heart the highways measured,
well-known roads. Courageous men
carried the head from the cliff by the sea,
an arduous task for all the band,
the firm in fight, since four were needed
on the shaft-of-slaughter[1] strenuously
to bear to the gold-hall Grendel's head.
So presently to the palace there
foemen fearless, fourteen Geats,
marching came. Their master-of-clan
mighty amid them the meadow-ways trod.
Strode[2] then within the sovran thane
fearless in fight, of fame renowned,
hardy hero, Hrothgar to greet.
And next by the hair into hall was borne

[1] Spear. [2] See note to v. 720.

Grendel's head, where the henchmen were drinking,
an awe to clan and queen alike,
a monster of marvel: the men looked on.

XXIV

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: —
"Lo, now, this sea-booty, son of Healfdene,
Lord of Scyldings, we've lustily brought thee,
sign of glory; thou seest it here.
Not lightly did I with my life escape!
In war under water this work I essayed
with endless effort; and even so
my strength had been lost had the Lord not shielded me.
Not a whit could I with Hrunting do
in work of war, though the weapon is good;
yet a sword the Sovran of Men vouchsafed me
to spy on the wall there, in splendor hanging,
old, gigantic, — how oft He guides
the friendless wight! — and I fought with that brand,
felling in fight, since fate was with me,
the house's wardens. That war-sword then
all burned, bright blade, when the blood gushed o'er it,
battle-sweat hot; but the hilt I brought back
from my foes. So avenged I their fiendish deeds,
death-fall of Danes, as was due and right.
And this is my hest, that in Heorot now
safe thou canst sleep with thy soldier band,
and every thane of all thy folk
both old and young; no evil fear,
Scyldings' lord, from that side again,

aught ill for thy earls, as erst thou must!"
Then the golden hilt, for that gray-haired leader,
hoary hero, in hand was laid,
giant-wrought, old. So owned and enjoyed it
after downfall of devils, the Danish lord,
wonder-smiths' work, since the world was rid
of that grim-souled fiend, the foe of God,
murder-marked, and his mother as well.
Now it passed into power of the people's king,
best of all that the oceans bound
who have scattered their gold o'er Scandia's isle.
Hrothgar spake — the hilt he viewed,
heirloom old, where was etched the rise
of that far-off fight when the floods o'erwhelmed,
raging waves, the race of giants
(fearful their fate!), a folk estranged
from God Eternal: whence guerdon due
in that waste of waters the Wielder paid them.
So on the guard of shining gold
in runic staves it was rightly said
for whom[1] the serpent-traced sword was wrought,
best of blades, in bygone days,
and the hilt well wound. — The wise-one spake,
son of Healfdene; silent were all: —
"Lo, so may he say who sooth and right
follows 'mid folk, of far times mindful,
a land-warden old,[2] that this earl belongs

[1] Often the maker put his own name on what he made, and in verse: *Ek Hlewagastiz Holtingaz horna tawido*, runs the inscription on the famous golden horn; that is, "I, Hlewagast Holting, this horn have made," — probably the oldest Germanic verse that is preserved.

[2] That is, "whoever has as wide authority as I have and can remember so far back so many instances of heroism, may well say, as I say, that no better hero ever lived than Beowulf."

to the better breed ! So, borne aloft,
thy fame must fly, O friend my Beowulf,
far and wide o'er folksteads many. Firmly thou shalt all maintain,[1]
mighty strength with mood of wisdom. Love of mine will I assure thee,
as, awhile ago, I promised; thou shalt prove a stay in future,
in far-off years, to folk of thine,
to the heroes a help. Was not Heremod[2] thus
to offspring of Ecgwela, Honor-Scyldings,
nor grew for their grace, but for grisly slaughter,
for doom of death to the Danishmen.
He slew, wrath-swollen, his shoulder-comrades,
companions at board ! So he passed alone,
chieftain haughty, from human cheer.
Though him the Maker with might endowed,
delights of power, and uplifted high
above all men, yet blood-fierce his mind,
his breast-hoard, grew; no bracelets gave he
to Danes as was due; he endured all joyless
strain of struggle and stress of woe,
long feud with his folk. Here find thy lesson !
Of virtue advise thee ! This verse[3] I have said for thee,
wise from lapsed winters. Wondrous seems
how to sons of men Almighty God

[1] The three verses are hypermetric in the original.

[2] The antitype again: see above, v. 901. Heremod is of Hrothgar's own kingdom; of Ecgwela, a Danish ancestor also, nothing is known.

[3] Poetry was a wide word of old, and *gid* — *i.e.* "verse" or "poem" — was also used to indicate the oral communication of wisdom (once always in rimed saws, proverbs, and the like) and philosophy.

in the strength of His spirit sendeth wisdom,
estate, high station : He swayeth all things.
Whiles He letteth right lustily fare
the heart of the hero of high-born race, —
in seat ancestral assigns him bliss,
his folk's sure fortress in fee to hold,
puts in his power great parts of the earth,
empire so ample, that end of it
this wanter-of-wisdom weeneth none.
So he waxes in wealth ; nowise can harm him
illness or age ; no evil cares
shadow his spirit ; no sword-hate threatens
from ever an enemy : all the world
wends at his will ; no worse he knoweth,
till all within him obstinate pride
waxes and wakes while the warden slumbers,
the spirit's sentry ; sleep is too fast
which masters his might, and the murderer nears,
stealthily shooting the shafts from his bow!

XXV

" Under harness his heart then is hit indeed
by sharpest shafts ; and no shelter avails
from foul behest of the hellish fiend.[1]
Him seems too little what long he possessed.
Greedy and grim, no golden rings

[1] That is, he is now undefended by conscience from the temptations (shafts) of the devil. This " sermon " of Hrothgar may be " of forty-parson power," as some one says ; but one likes to know what sort of sermon those English of the seventh century preferred. This one would have pleased Dr. Johnson. The same allegory is found in the Middle-English *Sawles Warde*, — that is, conscience, — and in many other places, times, and authors.

he gives for his pride ; the promised future
forgets he and spurns, with all God has sent him,
Wonder-Wielder, of wealth and fame.
Yet in the end it ever comes
that the frame of the body fragile yields,
fatéd falls ; and there follows another
who joyously the jewels divides,[1]
the royal riches, nor recks of his forebear.
Ban, then, such baleful thoughts, Beowulf dearest,
best of men, and the better part choose,
profit eternal ; and temper thy pride,
warrior famous ! The flower of thy might
lasts now a while : but erelong it shall be
that sickness or sword thy strength shall minish,
or fang of fire, or flooding billow,
or bite of blade, or brandished spear,
or odious age ; or the eyes' clear beam
wax dull and darken : Death even thee
in haste shall o'erwhelm, thou hero of war !
So the Ring-Danes these half-years a hundred I ruled,
wielded 'neath welkin, and warded them bravely
from mighty-ones many o'er middle-earth,
from spear and sword, till it seemed for me
no foe could be found under fold of the sky.
Lo, sudden the shift ! To me seated secure
came grief for joy when Grendel began
to harry my home, the hellish foe;
for those ruthless raids, unresting I suffered

[1] Note the *absumet heres Cæcuba dignior* as partly a division of treasure, the right Germanic thing to do, and the hint of revel and profusion in Horace's vein.

heart-sorrow heavy. Heaven be thanked,
Lord Eternal, for life extended
that I on this head all hewn and bloody,
after long evil, with eyes may gaze!
— Go to the bench now! Be glad at banquet,
warrior worthy! A wealth of treasure
at dawn of day, be dealt between us!"
Glad was the Geats' lord, going betimes
to seek his seat, as the Sage commanded.
Afresh, as before, for the famed-in-battle,
for the band of the hall, was a banquet dight
nobly anew. The Night-Helm darkened
dusk o'er the drinkers.
The doughty ones rose:
for the hoary-headed would hasten to rest,
agéd Scylding; and eager the Geat,
shield-fighter sturdy, for sleeping yearned.
Him wander-weary, warrior-guest
from far, a hall-thane heralded forth,
who by custom courtly cared for all
needs of a thane as in those old days
warrior-wanderers wont to have.
So slumbered the stout-heart. Stately the hall
rose gabled and gilt where the guest slept on
till a raven black the rapture-of-heaven[1]
blithe-heart boded. Bright came flying
shine after shadow. The swordsmen hastened,
athelings all were eager homeward
forth to fare; and far from thence

[1] Kenning for the sun. — This is a strange rôle for the raven. He is the warrior's bird of battle, exults in slaughter and carnage; his joy here is a compliment to the sunrise.

the great-hearted guest would guide his keel.
Bade then the hardy-one Hrunting be brought
to the son of Ecglaf, the sword bade him take,
excellent iron, and uttered his thanks for it,
quoth that he counted it keen in battle,
"war-friend" winsome: with words he slandered not
edge of the blade: 'twas a big-hearted man![1]
Now eager for parting and armed at point
warriors waited, while went to his host
that Darling of Danes. The doughty atheling
to high-seat hastened and Hrothgar greeted.

XXVI

Beowulf spake, bairn of Ecgtheow: —
"Lo, we seafarers say our will,
far-come men, that we fain would seek
Hygelac now. We here have found
hosts to our heart: thou hast harbored us well.
If ever on earth I am able to win me

[1] This is the simplest way to render a disputed passage; but it may not be the right way. The "hardy-one" here is Beowulf; he returns "Hrunting" in a formal speech, and praises its merits, laying no stress (properly, for enchantment was at work) on its failure to "bite" in the battle with Grendel's mother. So the Geat's courtesy is put in strong relief, and the parting from Unferth is contrasted with the meeting. Probably there were favorite songs once about Beowulf's flyting with Unferth, and our amiable Christian poet, who has doubtless softened many of its asperities, now lays stress on the reconciliation. Klaeber, however, has shown that the philological ways of this interpretation are not smooth. Moreover, the present to a parting guest was inexorable custom in Germania; and Unferth is only doing his duty when (the passage can so be read) he, "the hardy-one," the son of Ecglaf, orders "Hrunting" to be brought to Beowulf, who accepts it in his customary polite fashion. Of course, one must suppose that "Hrunting" has been already handed back to its owner, and is now finally presented.

more of thy love, O lord of men,
aught anew, than I now have done,
for work of war I am willing still!
If it come to me ever across the seas
that neighbor foemen annoy and fright thee, —
as they that hate thee erewhile have used, —
thousands then of thanes I shall bring,
heroes to help thee. Of Hygelac I know,
ward of his folk, that, though few his years,
the lord of the Geats will give me aid
by word and by work, that well I may serve thee,
wielding the war-wood to win thy triumph
and lending thee might when thou lackest men.
If thy Hrethric should come to court of Geats,[1]
a sovran's son, he will surely there
find his friends. A far-off land
each man should visit who vaunts him brave."
Him then answering, Hrothgar spake: —
"These words of thine the wisest God
sent to thy soul! No sager counsel
from so young in years e'er yet have I heard.
Thou art strong of main and in mind art wary,
art wise in words! I ween indeed
if ever it hap that Hrethel's heir[2]
by spear be seized, by sword-grim battle,

[1] Courteous, dignified, smoothly phrased, this leave-taking speech is admirable. — The custom of sending one's son to serve and live in other noble families was maintained in England down to relatively modern times. The concluding *sententia* admirably balances advantage of travel with the dangers of those who go far from the protection of their own kin.

[2] Hygelac. — The involutions and variations of this period — high compliment — are characteristic of all formal speeches in the epic.

by illness or iron,[1] thine elder and lord,
people's leader, — and life be thine, —
no seemlier man will the Sea-Geats find
at all to choose for their chief and king,
for hoard-guard of heroes, if hold thou wilt
thy kinsman's kingdom ! Thy keen mind pleases me
the longer the better, Beowulf loved !
Thou hast brought it about that both our peoples,
sons of the Geat and Spear-Dane folk,
shall have mutual peace, and from murderous strife,
such as once they waged, from war refrain.
Long as I rule this realm so wide,
let our hoards be common, let heroes with gold
each other greet o'er the gannet's-bath,
and the ringed-prow bear o'er rolling waves
tokens of love. I trow my landfolk
towards friend and foe are firmly joined,
and honor they keep in the olden way."
To him in the hall, then, Healfdene's son
gave treasures twelve, and the trust-of-earls
bade him fare with the gifts to his folk beloved,
hale to his home, and in haste return.
Then kissed the king of kin renowned,
Scyldings' chieftain, that choicest thane,
and fell on his neck. Fast flowed the tears
of the hoary-headed. Heavy with winters,
he had chances twain, but he clung to this,[2] —

[1] Compare for this combination of abstract and concrete, *Genesis*, v. 2296 : —

> When from thy heart *hunger or wolf*
> *soul and body* at the same time tears.

So, also, "battling and bulwarks," v. 2323, below.

[2] That is, he might or might not see Beowulf again. Old as he was, the latter chance was likely; but he clung to the former, hoping to see his young friend again "and exchange brave words in the hall."

that each should look on the other again,
and hear him in hall. Was this hero so dear to him,
his breast's wild billows he banned in vain;
safe in his soul a secret longing,
locked [1] in his mind, for that lovéd man
burned in his blood. Then Beowulf strode,
glad of his gold-gifts, the grass-plot o'er,
warrior blithe. The wave-roamer bode
riding at anchor, its owner awaiting.
As they hastened onward, Hrothgar's gift
they lauded at length. — 'Twas a lord unpeered,
every way blameless, till age had broken
— it spareth no mortal — his splendid might.

XXVII

Came now to ocean the ever-courageous
hardy henchmen, their harness bearing,
woven war-sarks. The warden marked,
trusty as ever, the earl's return.
From the height of the hill no hostile words
reached the guests as he rode to greet them;
but "Welcome!" he called to that Weder clan
as the sheen-mailed spoilers to ship marched on.
Then on the strand, with steeds and treasure
and armor their roomy and ring-dight ship
was heavily laden: high its mast

[1] The Anglo-Saxon gnomic poems insist on this secrecy of thought. When a man speaks or sings, "he unlocks his word-hoard." The advice of secrecy is emphasized for exiles and kinless men, as witness *The Wanderer*, v. 11:

Sooth I know,
in every earl 'tis an excellent trait
that he bar and bind his breast amain,
keep fast his thought-treasure, — think as he will.

rose over Hrothgar's hoarded gems.
A sword to the boat-guard Beowulf gave,
mounted with gold ; on the mead-bench since
he was better esteemed, that blade possessing,
heirloom old. — Their ocean-keel boarding,
they drove through the deep, and Daneland left.
A sea-cloth was set, a sail with ropes,
firm to the mast; the flood-timbers moaned; [1]
nor did wind over billows that wave-swimmer blow
across from her course. The craft sped on,
foam-necked it floated forth o'er the waves,
keel firm-bound over briny currents,
till they got them sight of the Geatish cliffs,
home-known headlands. High the boat,
stirred by winds, on the strand updrove.
Helpful at haven the harbor-guard stood,
who long already for loved companions
by the water had waited and watched afar.
He bound to the beach the broad-bosomed ship
with anchor-bands, lest ocean-billows
that trusty timber should tear away.
Then Beowulf bade them bear the treasure,
gold and jewels ; no journey far
was it thence to go to the giver of rings,
Hygelac Hrethling : at home he dwelt
by the sea-wall close, himself and clan.
Haughty that house, a hero the king,
high the hall, and Hygd [2] right young,

[1] With the speed of the boat.

[2] Queen to Hygelac. She is praised by contrast with the antitype, Thryth, just as Beowulf was praised by contrast with Heremod. The slight insertion of a negative in the text of v. 1932, made by Schücking,

wise and wary, though winters few
in those fortress walls she had found a home,
Hæreth's daughter. Nor humble her ways,
nor grudged she gifts to the Geatish men,
of precious treasure. Not Thryth's pride showed she,
folk-queen famed, or that fell deceit.
Was none so daring that durst make bold
(save her lord alone) of the liegemen dear
that lady full in the face to look,
but forgéd fetters he found his lot,
bonds of death! And brief the respite;
soon as they seized him, his sword-doom was spoken,
and the burnished blade a baleful murder
proclaimed and closed. No queenly way
for woman to practise, though peerless she,
that the weaver-of-peace [1] from warrior dear

Englische Studien, xxxix, 108 f., seems a most happy solution of the problem presented by this passage. The old emendation, —

But Thrytho proved,
folk-queen fearsome, fell and cruel . . .

was rejected by recent editors because Thrytho is not a likely form of the name. Reading as the translation reads, one has a most likely bit of praise by negative, in the usual manner of this poet, for Hygd, who did not show the cruelty and haughtiness of Thryth, the legendary wife of Offa, king of the Continental Angles. With her legend is perhaps mingled a reference to the Anglo-Saxon queen of the Mercian Offa, Cynethryth. She died in 795, and is too late for the original version of the *Beowulf*, if those considerations have weight which are urged against a date for the original version later than the seventh century. See, however, Stevenson's note to Asser's *Alfred*, Capp. 14, 15, and p. 206, where the tale of Eadburh, daughter to Offa of Mercia, is told to explain why Wessex folk disliked the name of "queen." — Thryth belongs to that well-known family of obstreperous maids who riot and rage until tamed by the right man. In no case can the description apply to Hygd, who is called "very young." — There is some reason for thinking that *The Banished Wife's Complaint*, an Anglo-Saxon lyric, is based on the story of Offa.

[1] Kenning for "wife."

by wrath and lying his life should reave!
But Hemming's kinsman [1] hindered this. —
For over their ale men also told
that of these folk-horrors fewer she wrought,[2]
onslaughts of evil, after she went,
gold-decked bride, to the brave young prince,
atheling haughty, and Offa's hall
o'er the fallow flood at her father's bidding
safely sought, where since she prospered,
royal, thronéd, rich in goods,
fain of the fair life fate had sent her,
and leal in love to the lord of warriors.
He, of all heroes I heard of ever
from sea to sea, of the sons of earth,
most excellent seemed. Hence [3] Offa was praised
for his fighting and feeing by far-off men,
the spear-bold warrior; wisely he ruled
over his empire. Eomer woke to him,
help of heroes, Hemming's kinsman,
grandson of Garmund,[4] grim in war.

XXVIII

Hastened the hardy one, henchmen with him,
sandy strand of the sea to tread
and widespread ways. The world's great candle,
sun shone from south. They strode along

[1] Eomer, as below (conjecturally), v. 1960; or, as Gering suggests, Offa himself.

[2] Litotes for "ceased altogether." — Offa is praised in the *Widsith* lay, v. 38.

[3] See the ideal of a good king at the opening of the poem.

[4] The genealogy of the Mercian Offa makes his ancestral Anglian namesake, Offa, the son of *Wærmund*.

with sturdy steps to the spot they knew
where the battle-king young, his burg within,
slayer of Ongentheow,[1] shared the rings,
shelter-of-heroes. To Hygelac
Beowulf's coming was quickly told, —
that there in the court the clansmen's refuge,
the shield-companion sound and alive,
hale from the hero-play homeward strode.
With haste in the hall, by highest order,
room for the rovers was readily made.
By his sovran he sat, come safe from battle,
kinsman by kinsman. His kindly lord
he first had greeted in gracious form,
with manly words. The mead dispensing,
came through the high hall Hæreth's daughter,
winsome to warriors, wine-cup bore
to the hands of the heroes. Hygelac then
his comrade fairly with question plied
in the lofty hall, sore longing to know
what manner of sojourn the Sea-Geats made.
"What came of thy quest, my kinsman Beowulf,
when thy yearnings suddenly swept thee yonder
battle to seek o'er the briny sea,
combat in Heorot? Hrothgar couldst thou
aid at all, the honored chief,
in his wide-known woes? With waves of care
my sad heart seethed; I sore mistrusted
my loved one's venture: long I begged thee
by no means to seek that slaughtering monster,

[1] By the hands of one of his retainers, who, as Tacitus pointed out, and Earle reminds us, were bound to attribute their own brave deeds to their chief, and give him the glory.

but suffer the South-Danes to settle their feud
themselves with Grendel. Now God be thanked
that safe and sound I can see thee now ! "

Beowulf spake, the bairn of Ecgtheow: —

" 'Tis known and unhidden, Hygelac Lord,
to many men, that meeting of ours,
struggle grim between Grendel and me,
which we fought on the field where full too many
sorrows he wrought for the Scylding-Victors,
evils unending. These all I avenged.
No boast can be from breed of Grendel,
any on earth, for that uproar at dawn,[1]
from the longest-lived of the loathsome race
in fleshly fold ! — But first I went
Hrothgar to greet in the hall of gifts,
where Healfdene's kinsman high-renowned,
soon as my purpose was plain to him,
assigned me a seat by his son and heir.
The liegemen were lusty; my life-days never
such merry men over mead in hall
have I heard under heaven ! The high-born queen,
people's peace-bringer, passed through the hall,
cheered the young clansmen, clasps of gold,
ere she sought her seat, to sundry gave.
Oft to the heroes Hrothgar's daughter,
to earls in turn, the ale-cup tendered, —
she whom I heard these hall-companions
Freawaru name, when fretted gold
she proffered the warriors. Promised is she,

[1] "Struggle by night," translates Gering; that is, the fight between Grendel and Beowulf. It might refer, however, — see v. 126, — to the outcries and wailings of the Danes. No more boasting over that!

gold-decked maid, to the glad son of Froda.
Sage this seems to the Scyldings'-friend,
kingdom's-keeper: he counts it wise
the woman to wed so and ward off feud,
store of slaughter. But seldom ever
when men are slain, does the murder-spear sink
but briefest while, though the bride be fair ![1]
"Nor haply will like it the Heathobard lord,
and as little each of his liegemen all,
when a thane of the Danes, in that doughty throng,
goes with the lady along their hall,
and on him the old-time heirlooms glisten
hard and ring-decked, Heathobard's treasure,
weapons that once they wielded fair
until they lost at the linden-play[2]

[1] Beowulf gives his uncle the king not mere gossip of his journey, but a statesmanlike forecast of the outcome of certain policies at the Danish court. Talk of interpolation here is absurd. As both Beowulf and Hygelac know, — and the folk for whom the *Beowulf* was put together also knew, — Froda was king of the Heathobards (probably the Langobards, once near neighbors of Angle and Saxon tribes on the continent), and had fallen in fight with the Danes. Hrothgar will set aside this feud by giving his daughter as "peace-weaver" and wife to the young king Ingeld, son of the slain Froda. But Beowulf, on general principles and from his observation of the particular case, foretells trouble. He even goes into particulars; and here the poet not unskilfully uses the actual Ingeld story, — which he knew doubtless in song and saga, as Saxo Grammaticus knew it, though in another version — for the forecast of the hero. It is worth noting that in Saxo the old warrior stirs his master by a lay of battle and vengeance which he chants at a banquet. — From the *Widsith* we know that Ingeld attacked Hrothgar later in Heorot, and was defeated by uncle and nephew in a bloody battle.

[2] Play of shields, battle. A Danish warrior cuts down Froda in the fight, and takes his sword and armor, leaving them to a son. This son is selected to accompany his mistress, the young princess Freawaru, to her new home when she is Ingeld's queen. Heedlessly he wears the sword of Froda in hall. An old warrior points it out to Ingeld, and eggs him

liegeman leal and their lives as well.
Then, over the ale, on this heirloom gazing,
some ash-wielder old [1] who has all in mind
that spear-death of men,[2] — he is stern of mood,
heavy at heart, — in the hero young
tests the temper and tries the soul
and war-hate wakens, with words like these: —
Canst thou not, comrade, ken that sword
which to the fray thy father carried
in his final feud, 'neath the fighting-mask,
dearest of blades, when the Danish slew him
and wielded the war-place on Withergild's fall,[3]
after havoc of heroes, those hardy Scyldings?
Now, the son of a certain slaughtering Dane,
proud of his treasure, paces this hall,
joys in the killing, and carries the jewel [4]
that rightfully ought to be owned by thee!
Thus he urges and eggs him all the time
with keenest words, till occasion offers
that Freawaru's thane, for his father's deed,
after bite of brand in his blood must slumber,

on to vengeance. At his instigation the Dane is killed ; but the murderer, afraid of results, and knowing the land, escapes. So the old feud must break out again.

[1] In Saxo (Bk. VI) Starcatherus sees that the slayers of Frotho, father of Ingellus, are high in favor with the latter king, and sings a song of reproach at the banquet. At first he complains of the neglect of himself in his old age and of the king's gluttony ; then he passes to taunts of cowardice and an appeal for vengeance on the murderers.

[2] That is, their disastrous battle and the slaying of their king.

[3] Withergild is mentioned in *Widsith*, v. 124, and must be a proper name. If it were taken otherwise, it might be translated "when recompence, chance to recover losses, was out of the question."

[4] The sword, here called "treasure" or "jewel" in no strained figure. It is unnecessary to turn it into a collar or other adornment.

losing his life; but that liegeman flies
living away, for the land he kens.
And thus be broken on both their sides
oaths of the earls, when Ingeld's breast
wells with war-hate, and wife-love now
after the care-billows cooler grows.
"So [1] I hold not high the Heathobards' faith
due to the Danes, or their during love
and pact of peace. — But I pass from that,
turning to Grendel, O giver-of-treasure,
and saying in full how the fight resulted,
hand-fray of heroes. When heaven's jewel
had fled o'er far fields, that fierce sprite came,
night-foe savage, to seek us out
where safe and sound we sentried the hall.
To Hondscio then was that harassing deadly,
his fall there was fated. He first was slain,
girded warrior. Grendel on him
turned murderous mouth, on our mighty kinsman,
and all of the brave man's body devoured.
Yet none the earlier, empty-handed,
would the bloody-toothed murderer, mindful of bale,
outward go from the gold-decked hall:
but me he attacked in his terror of might,
with greedy hand grasped me. A glove hung by him [2]

[1] Beowulf returns to his forecast. Things might well go somewhat as follows, he says; sketches a little tragic story; and with this prophecy by illustration returns to the tale of his adventure. One will hardly agree with Müllenhoff that such a use by the poet of an old legend shows mere helpless imbecility of interpolation. In many other cases, say Gray's *Bard*, the close of Dickens's *Tale of two Cities*, *Thomas of Ercaldoune*, — to mention some very incongruous instances, — one praises the good art or artifice of narrative.

[2] Not an actual glove, but a sort of bag. The line could run —

. . . with savage hand seized me. A sack hung by him . . .

wide and wondrous, wound with bands;
and in artful wise it all was wrought,
by devilish craft, of dragon-skins.
Me therein, an innocent man,
the fiendish foe was fain to thrust
with many another. He might not so,
when I all angrily upright stood.
'Twere long to relate how that land-destroyer
I paid in kind for his cruel deeds;
yet there, my prince, this people of thine
got fame by my fighting. He fled away,
and a little space his life preserved;
but there staid behind him his stronger hand
left in Heorot; heartsick thence
on the floor of the ocean that outcast fell.
Me for this struggle the Scyldings'-friend
paid in plenty with plates of gold,
with many a treasure, when morn had come
and we all at the banquet-board sat down.
Then was song and glee. The gray-haired Scylding,
much tested, told of the times of yore.
Whiles the hero his harp bestirred,
wood-of-delight; now lays he chanted
of sooth and sadness, or said aright
legends of wonder, the wide-hearted king;
or for years of his youth he would yearn at times,
for strength of old struggles, now stricken with age,
hoary hero: his heart surged full
when, wise with winters, he wailed their flight.
Thus in the hall the whole of that day
at ease we feasted, till fell o'er earth
another night. Anon full ready

in greed of vengeance, Grendel's mother
set forth all doleful. Dead was her son
through war-hate of Weders; now, woman monstrous,
with fury fell a foeman she slew,
avenged her offspring. From Æschere old,
loyal councillor, life was gone;
nor might they e'en, when morning broke,
those Danish people, their death-done comrade
burn with brands, on balefire lay
the man they mourned. Under mountain stream
she had carried the corpse with cruel hands.
For Hrothgar that was the heaviest sorrow
of all that had laden the lord of his folk.
The leader then, by thy life, besought me
(sad was his soul) in the sea-waves' coil
to play the hero and hazard my being
for glory of prowess: my guerdon he pledged.
I then in the waters — 'tis widely known —
that sea-floor-guardian savage found.
Hand-to-hand there a while we struggled;
billows welled blood; in the briny hall
her head I hewed with a hardy blade
from Grendel's mother, — and gained my life,
though not without danger. My doom was not yet.
Then the haven-of-heroes, Healfdene's son,
gave me in guerdon great gifts of price.

XXXI[1]

"So held this king to the customs old,
that I wanted for nought in the wage I gained,
the meed of my might; he made me gifts,

[1] Sections XXIX and XXX are not indicated.

Healfdene's heir, for my own disposal.
Now to thee, my prince, I proffer them all,
gladly give them. Thy grace alone
can find me favor. Few[1] indeed
have I of kinsmen, save, Hygelac, thee!"
Then he bade them bear him the boar-head standard,[2]
the battle-helm high, and breastplate gray,
the splendid sword; then spake in form: —
"Me this war-gear the wise old prince,
Hrothgar, gave, and his hest he added,
that its story be straightway said to thee.[3] —
A while it was held by Heorogar king,
for long time lord of the land of Scyldings;
yet not to his son the sovran left it,
to daring Heoroweard, — dear as he was to him,
his harness of battle. — Well hold thou it all!"
And I heard that soon passed o'er the path[4] of this treasure,
all apple-fallow, four good steeds,
each like the others; arms and horses
he gave to the king. So should kinsmen be,
not weave one another the net of wiles,
or with deep-hid treachery death contrive

[1] "None." He forgets, or lets his compliment forget, Weohstan: see vv. 2813, 2602, below. But over fifty years pass between this date and the date of his speech to Wiglaf. Weohstan, moreover, was in service at the Swedish court (Gering suggests that he was a younger son and sought his fortune in foreign parts), and was actually fighting on the side of Geatland's foes. See note to v. 2602, below.

[2] See v. 1021. Klaeber, *Modern Philology*, III, 462, compares the old "Raven" banners of the Northmen mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; and Professor Hart refers to Asser's *Life of Alfred*, trans. Giles, Bohn ed., p. 62.

[3] Or: That first to thee should his thanks be said.

[4] Followed it. The original figure is "guarded its tracks."

for neighbor and comrade. His nephew was ever
by hardy Hygelac held full dear,
and each kept watch o'er the other's weal.
I heard, too, the necklace to Hygd he presented,
wonder-wrought treasure, which Wealhtheow gave him,
sovran's daughter: three steeds he added,
slender and saddle-gay. Since such gift
the gem gleamed bright on the breast of the queen.
Thus showed his strain the son of Ecgtheow
as a man remarked for mighty deeds
and acts of honor. At ale he slew not
comrade or kin; nor cruel his mood,
though of sons of earth his strength was greatest,
a glorious gift that God had sent
the splendid leader. Long was he spurned,
and worthless by Geatish warriors held;
him at mead the master-of-clans
failed full oft to favor at all.
Slack and shiftless[1] the strong men deemed him,
profitless prince; but payment came,
to the warrior honored, for all his woes. —
Then the bulwark-of-earls[2] bade bring within,
hardy chieftain, Hrethel's heirloom
garnished with gold: no Geat e'er knew
in shape of a sword a statelier prize.
The brand he laid in Beowulf's lap;
and of hides assigned him seven thousand,[3]

[1] Even in the name and story of the Roman Brutus one finds traces of this common motive in certain tales of the sluggish and stupid boy who blossoms out as a warrior, a hero of renown. It is very common in Norse legend.

[2] Hygelac.

[3] This is generally assumed to mean hides, though the text simply

with house and high-seat.[1] They held in common
land alike by their line of birth,
inheritance, home: but higher the king
because of his rule o'er the realm itself.

Now further it fell with the flight of years,
with harryings horrid, that Hygelac perished,[2]
and Heardred, too, by hewing of swords
under the shield-wall slaughtered lay,
when him at the van of his victor-folk

says "seven thousand." In v. 2994 Wulf and Eofor each get "a hundred thousand in land and winding rings." A hide in England meant about 120 acres, though "the size of the acre varied." Wulf and Eofor together would thus get a tract as large as England itself; see Mr. W. H. Stevenson's note in his edition of Asser's *Alfred*, p. 154. He points out that the numeral refers to both land and treasure. In this passage the seven thousand may also include the value of "house and high-seat," with vague idea of treasure in the bargain. Both numerals, then, the seven thousand and the hundred thousand, are indefinite expressions of quantity, somewhat as when one now says of a man that he is "worth a million."

[1] The seat in hall like a throne occupied by the owner and the head of the clan.

[2] On the historical raid into Frankish territory between 512 and 520 A.D. The subsequent course of events, as gathered from hints of this epic, is partly told in Scandinavian legend. Heardred succeeds to the throne; for Beowulf most honorably refuses Hygd's proposal and serves the young king as guardian and chief vassal. But the reign is short. If with Gering we put 518 as the date of Hygelac's fall, it would not be long before Heardred took up the cause of Eanmund and Eadgils, sons of Ohtere, both of them rebels against their uncle Onela, the Swedish king. Onela makes a raid into the territory of Heardred and kills him. Then Beowulf succeeds. His further relations with this feud will be noted below. — Heardred is called Hereric's nephew. As the sister's son was a conspicuous relationship, and men had names from it analogous to the patronymic method, one may suppose that Hygd had a brother Hereric.

sought hardy heroes, Heatho-Scilfings,
in arms o'erwhelming Hereric's nephew.
Then Beowulf came as king this broad
realm to wield ; and he ruled it well
fifty winters,[1] a wise old prince,
warding his land, until One began
in the dark of night, a Dragon, to rage.
In the grave on the hill a hoard it guarded,
in the stone-barrow steep. A strait path reached it,
unknown to mortals. Some man, however,
came by chance that cave within
to the heathen hoard.[2] In hand he took
a golden goblet, nor gave he it back,

[1] The chronology of the epic, as scholars have worked it out, would make Beowulf well over ninety years of age when he fights the dragon. But the fifty years of his reign need not be taken as historical fact.

[2] The text is here hopelessly illegible, and only the general drift of the meaning can be rescued. For one thing, we have the old myth of a dragon who guards hidden treasure. But with this runs the story of some noble, last of his race, who hides all his wealth within this barrow and there chants his farewell to life's glories. After his death the dragon takes possession of the hoard and watches over it. A condemned or banished man, desperate, hides in the barrow, discovers the treasure, and while the dragon sleeps, makes off with a golden beaker or the like, and carries it for propitiation to his master. The dragon discovers the loss and exacts fearful penalty from the people round about. — The huge barrows were prominent objects and frequent; in the oldest English charters we have directions for bounding estates "from the heathen barrow." They are still familiar in many an English landscape, like Mr. Hardy's "Egdon Heath." Barrows have been opened which had a secret entrance somewhat as described here. Moreover, the robbing of graves which contained treasure or property proportional to the standing of the buried man, must have been a strong temptation. That superstition surrounded this crime with every sort of danger is evident enough. See below, vv. 3051–3073. Lifting buried gold is still an uncanny business, and folk-lore recounts its perils. Such gold brings the worst of luck ; and it is noteworthy that the epic takes this view, v. 3163, and has all the dragon's treasure heaped in Beowulf's own tomb.

stole with it away, while the watcher slept,
by thievish wiles: for the warden's wrath
prince and people must pay betimes!

XXXII

That way he went with no will of his own,
in danger of life, to the dragon's hoard,
but for pressure of peril, some prince's thane.
He fled in fear the fatal scourge,
seeking shelter, a sinful man,
and entered in. At the awful sight
tottered that guest, and terror seized him;
yet the wretched fugitive rallied anon
from fright and fear ere he fled away,
and took the cup from that treasure-hoard.
Of such besides there was store enough,
heirlooms old, the earth below,
which some earl forgotten, in ancient years,
left the last of his lofty race,
heedfully there had hidden away,
dearest treasure. For death of yore
had hurried all hence; and he alone
left to live, the last of the clan,
weeping his friends, yet wished to bide
warding the treasure, his one delight,
though brief his respite. The barrow, new-ready,
to strand and sea-waves stood anear,[1]
hard by the headland, hidden and closed;
there laid within it his lordly heirlooms

[1] Jacob Grimm, alive to the poetry of these old traditions, tells of the grave-chamber of one Swedish king which was close to the sea.

and heapéd hoard of heavy gold
that warden of rings. Few words he spake:[1] —
"Now hold thou, earth, since heroes may not,
what earls have owned! Lo, erst from thee
brave men brought it! But battle-death seized
and cruel killing my clansmen all,
robbed them of life and a liegeman's joys.
None have I left to lift the sword,
or to cleanse the carven cup of price,
beaker bright. My brave are gone.
And the helmet hard, all haughty with gold,
shall part from its plating. Polishers sleep
who could brighten and burnish the battle-mask;
and those weeds of war that were wont to brave
over bicker of shields the bite of steel
rust with their bearer. The ringéd mail
fares not far with famous chieftain,
at side of hero! No harp's delight,
no glee-wood's gladness! No good hawk[2] now
flies through the hall! Nor horses fleet
stamp in the burgstead! Battle and death
the flower of my race have reft away."
Mournful of mood, thus he moaned his woe,
alone, for them all, and unblithe wept
by day and by night, till death's fell wave
o'erwhelmed his heart. His hoard-of-bliss

[1] Müllenhoff remarked on the resemblance of this elegiac passage to the poems of the Exeter Ms., — *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*. But in point of fact it is the favorite "deep note" of English poetry at large, which always takes strength of word and emotion from the thought of death.

[2] When the father sees his "Pearl," in the poem of that name, he is afraid and bides as still "as hawk in hall."

that old ill-doer open found,
who, blazing at twilight the barrows haunteth,
naked foe-dragon flying by night
folded in fire: the folk of earth
dread him sore. 'Tis his doom to seek
hoard in the graves, and heathen gold
to watch, many-wintered: nor wins he thereby!
Powerful this plague-of-the-people thus
held the house of the hoard in earth
three hundred winters; till One aroused
wrath in his breast, to the ruler bearing
that costly cup, and the king implored
for bond of peace. So the barrow was plundered,
borne off was booty. His boon was granted
that wretched man; and his ruler saw
first time what was fashioned in far-off days.
When the dragon awoke, new woe was kindled.
O'er the stone he snuffed. The stark-heart found
footprint of foe who so far had gone
in his hidden craft by the creature's head. —
So may the undoomed easily flee
evils and exile, if only he gain
the grace of The Wielder! — That warden of gold
o'er the ground went seeking, greedy to find
the man who wrought him such wrong in sleep.
Savage and burning, the barrow he circled
all without; nor was any there,
none in the waste. . . . Yet war he desired,
was eager for battle. The barrow he entered,
sought the cup, and discovered soon
that some one of mortals had searched his treasure,
his lordly gold. The guardian waited

ill-enduring till evening came;
boiling with wrath was the barrow's keeper,
and fain with flame the foe to pay
for the dear cup's loss. — Now day was fled
as the worm had wished. By its wall no more
was it glad to bide, but burning flew
folded in flame: a fearful beginning
for sons of the soil; and soon it came,
in the doom of their lord, to a dreadful end.

XXXIII

Then the baleful fiend its fire belched out,
and bright homes burned. The blaze stood high
all landsfolk frighting. No living thing
would that loathly one leave as aloft it flew.
Wide was the dragon's warring seen,
its fiendish fury far and near,
as the grim destroyer those Geatish people
hated and hounded. To hidden lair,
to its hoard it hastened at hint of dawn.
Folk of the land it had lapped in flame,
with bale and brand. In its barrow it trusted,
its battling and bulwarks: that boast was vain!

To Beowulf then the bale was told
quickly and truly: the king's own home,
of buildings the best, in brand-waves melted,
that gift-throne of Geats. To the good old man
sad in heart, 'twas heaviest sorrow.
The sage assumed that his sovran God
he had angered, breaking ancient law,
and embittered the Lord. His breast within

with black thoughts welled, as his wont was never.
The folk's own fastness that fiery dragon
with flame had destroyed, and the stronghold all
washed by waves; but the warlike king,
prince of the Weders, plotted vengeance.
Warriors'-bulwark, he bade them work
all of iron — the earl's commander —
a war-shield wondrous: well he knew
that forest-wood against fire were worthless,
linden could aid not. — Atheling brave,
he was fated to finish this fleeting life,[1]
his days on earth, and the dragon with him,
though long it had watched o'er the wealth of the hoard! —
Shame he reckoned it, sharer-of-rings,
to follow the flyer-afar with a host,
a broad-flung band; nor the battle feared he,
nor deemed he dreadful the dragon's warring,
its vigor and valor: ventures desperate
he had passed a-plenty, and perils of war,
contest-crash, since, conqueror proud,
Hrothgar's hall he had wholly purged,
and in grapple had killed the kin of Grendel,
loathsome breed! Not least was that
of hand-to-hand fights where Hygelac fell,
when the ruler of Geats in rush of battle,
lord of his folk, in the Frisian land,
son of Hrethel, by sword-draughts[2] died,

[1] Literally "loan-days," days loaned to man. Professor Hart refers to the striking passage in *Everyman*, vv. 164 ff.

[2] This fine figure of the sword drinking the blood from the wounds it has made should not be weakened. It is like that tremendous metaphor

by brands down-beaten. Thence Beowulf fled
through strength of himself and his swimming power,
though alone, and his arms were laden with thirty
coats of mail, when he came to the sea![1]
Nor yet might Hetwaras[2] haughtily boast
their craft of contest, who carried against him
shields to the fight: but few escaped
from strife with the hero to seek their homes!
Then swam over ocean Ecgtheow's son
lonely and sorrowful, seeking his land,
where Hygd made him offer of hoard and realm,
rings and royal-seat, reckoning naught
the strength of her son to save their kingdom
from hostile hordes, after Hygelac's death.
No sooner for this could the stricken ones
in any wise move that atheling's mind
over young Heardred's head as lord
and ruler of all the realm to be:
yet the hero upheld him with helpful words,
aided in honor, till, older grown,
he wielded the Weder-Geats. — Wandering exiles
sought him o'er seas, the sons of Ohtere,
who had spurned the sway of the Scylfings'-helmet,

in the *Exodus*, when the engulfing waves which clash over the drowned Egyptians and toss their crests to heaven are thus compressed: —

mightest of sea-deaths
lashed the sky, —

that is, the sea which brought about death.

[1] It is like the additional touch which legend always gives to history, when Beowulf has this *douceur* of the thirty suits of armor, corresponding to his hand-gripe of thirty-man power.

[2] Chattuarii, a tribe that dwelt along the Rhine, and took part in repelling the raid of (Hygelac) Chocilaicus.

the bravest and best that broke the rings,
in Swedish land, of the sea-kings' line,
haughty hero.[1] Hence Heardred's end.
For shelter he gave them, sword-death came,
the blade's fell blow, to bairn of Hygelac;
but the son of Ongentheow sought again
house and home when Heardred fell,
leaving Beowulf lord of Geats
and gift-seat's master.— A good king he!

XXXIV

The fall of his lord he was fain to requite
in after days; and to Eadgils he proved
friend to the friendless, and forces sent
over the sea to the son of Ohtere,
weapons and warriors: well repaid he
those care-paths cold when the king he slew.[2]
Thus safe through struggles the son of Ecgtheow
had passed a plenty, through perils dire,
with daring deeds, till this day was come
that doomed him now with the dragon to strive.
With comrades eleven the lord of Geats
swollen in rage went seeking the dragon.

[1] Onela, son of Ongentheow, who pursues his two nephews Eanmund and Eadgils to Heardred's court, where they have taken refuge after their unsuccessful rebellion. In the fighting Heardred is killed.

[2] That is, Beowulf supports Eadgils against Onela, who is slain by Eadgils in revenge for the "care-paths" of exile into which Onela forced him. Bugge, relying on the Norse story, translates "*by* care-paths cold"; that is, Eadgils revenged himself by marches fraught with care or sorrow for Onela. As the battle in the *Ynglingasaga* takes place on the ice, Bugge reads "cold" literally. But it is the technical adjective for exile; "winter-cold exile," *e.g.* in *Deor's Song*.

He had heard whence all the harm arose
and the killing of clansmen; that cup of price
on the lap of the lord had been laid by the finder.
In the throng was this one thirteenth man,
starter of all the strife and ill,
care-laden captive; cringing thence
forced and reluctant, he led them on
till he came in ken of that cavern-hall,
the barrow delved near billowy surges,
flood of ocean. Within 'twas full
of wire-gold and jewels; a jealous warden,
warrior trusty, the treasures held,
lurked in his lair. Not light the task
of entrance for any of earth-born men!
Sat on the headland the hero king,
spake words of hail [1] to his hearth-companions,
gold-friend of Geats. All gloomy his soul,
wavering,[2] death-bound. Wyrd full nigh
stood ready to greet the gray-haired man,
to seize his soul-hoard, sunder apart
life and body. Not long would be
the warrior's spirit enwound with flesh.
Beowulf spake, the bairn of Ecgtheow: —
"Through store of struggles I strove in youth,
mighty feuds; I mind them all.
I was seven years old when the sovran of rings,
friend-of-his-folk, from my father took me,

[1] *Hǣlo.* — Surely not "farewell," in spite of the lugubrious context, which is quite in line with the usual epic anticipation of ill success and death. It is his *beot* really, his vow, largely reminiscent of other struggles, but closing with an explicit promise of valorous deed.

[2] *Animula vagula.* — The personification of Wyrd should be noticed; it occurs so in the *Heliand* itself.

had me, and held me, Hrethel the king,
with food and fee, faithful in kinship.
Ne'er, while I lived there, he loathlier found me,[1]
bairn in the burg, than his birthright sons,
Herebeald and Hæthcyn and Hygelac mine.
For the eldest of these, by unmeet chance,
by kinsman's deed, was the death-bed strewn,
when Hæthcyn killed him with horny bow,
his own dear liege laid low with an arrow,
missed the mark and his mate shot down,
one brother the other, with bloody shaft.
A feeless fight[2] and a fearful sin,
horror to Hrethel; yet, hard as it was,
unavenged must the atheling die!
Too awful it is for an agéd man
to bide and bear, that his bairn so young

[1] Usual litotes: "he held me no less dear."

[2] That is, the king could claim no wergild, or man-price, from one son for the killing of the other. The *casus* is peculiarly Germanic in detail; in general scope it is like the great kin-tragedies of the world's literature. A similar story is told in the *Thithrekssaga* of Herbort, Herdegen, and Sintram, but, as Müllenhoff points out, with a different ending. In the Scottish ballad of *The Twa Brothers*, one kills the other while wrestling (though with a knife); but the ballad touches the parent only by messages to account for the disappearance of John. It is important to understand that the picture of the old king's grief is hypothetical. There is no wergild, says the poet, and revenge is out of the question. For let one but fancy the feelings of a father who has caused his son to be hanged! The picture of such a state of things then follows. Then (v. 2462) one returns to Hrethel with the remark that his case was really as sad as the hypothetical one. Gering thinks that the poet took his picture of the broken-hearted parent from the story of Ermanric, of whom the *Volsungasaga* relates that he caused his only son to be hanged on an accusation of misconduct with Swanhild, the young man's stepmother. Ermanric's story was known to English poetry. See above, v. 1201, and the stanza in *Deor's Song*.

rides [1] on the gallows. A rime he makes,
sorrow-song for his son there hanging
as rapture of ravens; no rescue now
can come from the old, disabled man!
Still is he minded, as morning breaks,
of the heir gone elsewhere; [2] another he hopes not
he will bide to see his burg within
as ward for his wealth, now the one has found
doom of death that the deed incurred.
Forlorn he looks on the lodge of his son,
wine-hall waste and wind-swept chambers
reft of revel. The rider sleepeth,
the hero, far-hidden; [3] no harp resounds,
in the courts no wassail, as once was heard.

XXXV

"Then he goes to his chamber, a grief-song chants
alone for his lost. Too large all seems,
homestead and house. So the helmet-of-Weders
hid in his heart for Herebeald
waves of woe. No way could he take
to avenge on the slayer slaughter so foul;

[1] The regular metaphor in this case. The traditional phrase held for a long while. Wright and Halliwell, *Reliquiae Antiquae*, II, 119, print from a Harleian Ms. these verses where Christ calls on man to consider the sacrifice on the cross: —

> Restles I ride, —
> Lok upon me, put fro [thee] pride!
> Mi palefrey is of tre. . . ."

that is, "my horse is made of wood." Vigfusson, in one of the Grimm centenary papers, says that gallows were horse-shaped. ["Traces of Old Law in the Eddic Lays."]

[2] Usual euphemism for death.

[3] Sc. in the grave.

nor e'en could he harass that hero at all
with loathing deed, though he loved him not.
And so for the sorrow his soul endured,
men's gladness he gave up and God's light chose.
Lands and cities he left his sons
(as the wealthy do) when he went from earth.
There was strife and struggle 'twixt Swede and Geat
o'er the width of waters; war arose,
hard battle-horror, when Hrethel died,
and Ongentheow's offspring grew
strife-keen, bold, nor brooked o'er the seas
pact of peace, but pushed their hosts
to harass in hatred by Hreosnabeorh.[1]
Men of my folk for that feud had vengeance,
for woful war ('tis widely known),
though one of them bought it with blood of his heart,
a bargain hard: for Hæthcyn proved

[1] This war must not be confused with the later hostilities between Geat and Swede in Heardred's reign, already noted (vv. 2200 ff.); it deals with an older feud, the main course of which can be surmised from this passage and the long speech of the messenger (see v. 2922, below) who announces Beowulf's death, and says that now not only will Frisians and Franks be bent on war, but the Swedes will surely renew the ancient strife. Onela and Ohthere are sons of Ongentheow, and often raid Geatland (the mention of "wide water" makes for the Jutland theory of Beowulf's home); Hæthcyn replies with a raid on Swedish soil. He seizes Ongentheow's queen. But the old king follows the foe, defeats him, and kills Hæthcyn, whose men are in desperate case, surrounded by enemies, in Ravenswood. But now comes Hygelac with another Geatish army (not so favorable a fact for Jutland !), defeats the Swedes, whose queen again is captured, and besieges Ongentheow in his citadel. Ongentheow is finally killed by Eofor, whose brother Wulf has been disabled in fierce fight with the desperate old hero. Eofor is then married to Hygelac's daughter. The lively but episodic account of this last struggle makes one yearn for the original songs, perhaps the epic, in which it was sung. Bugge has shown traces of it in Norse tradition. The style of reference to the death of Hæthcyn shows how familiar the whole story must have been.

fatal that fray, for the first-of-Geats.
At morn, I heard, was the murderer killed
by kinsman for kinsman,[1] with clash of sword,
when Ongentheow met Eofor there.
Wide split the war-helm: wan he fell,
hoary Scylfing; the hand that smote him
of feud was mindful, nor flinched from the death-blow.

— "For all that he[2] gave me, my gleaming sword
repaid him at war, — such power I wielded, —
for lordly treasure: with land he entrusted me,
homestead and house. He had no need
from Swedish realm, or from Spear-Dane folk,
or from men of the Gifths,[3] to get him help, —
some warrior worse for wage to buy!
Ever I fought in the front of all,
sole to the fore; and so shall I fight
while I bide in life and this blade shall last
that early and late hath loyal proved
since for my doughtiness Dæghrefn[4] fell,

[1] Eofor for Wulf. — The immediate provocation for Eofor in killing "the hoary Scylfing," Ongentheow, is that the latter has just struck Wulf down; but the king, Hæthcyn, is also avenged by the blow. See the detailed description below, vv. 2961–2982.

[2] Hygelac. — Beowulf comes to his own services and their reward; the transition is so abrupt that some verses may be supposed to have been lost at this point. It will be noted that he speaks throughout this monologue as a warrior, stout with sword, and not as a wrestler, phenomenal "strong man," or the like, except in the almost contradictory parenthesis, vv. 2506 f. In vv. 2518 f., the poet is matching Beowulf's speech before the Grendel fight (677 ff.); while in 2680 ff., the "strong man" is again the main theme, backed by an old Anglian legend of another prince.

[3] Gepidae, who at this time were still near the Baltic. See Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Alterthumskunde*, II, 99; and *Widsith*, v. 60.

[4] The Franks were called Hugones; and this "Day-Raven" may have fought Beowulf on the historic raid into Frankish territory.

slain by my hand, the Hugas' champion.
Nor fared he thence to the Frisian king
with the booty back, and breast-adornments;
but, slain in struggle, that standard-bearer
fell, atheling brave. Not with blade was he slain,
but his bones were broken by brawny gripe,
his heart-waves stilled. — The sword-edge now,
hard blade and my hand, for the hoard shall strive."
Beowulf spake, and a battle-vow made,
his last of all: "I have lived through many
wars in my youth; now once again,
old folk-defender, feud will I seek,
do doughty deeds, if the dark destroyer
forth from his cavern come to fight me!"
Then hailed he the helmeted heroes all,
for the last time greeting his liegemen dear,
comrades of war: "I should carry no weapon,
no sword to the serpent, if sure I knew
how, with such enemy, else my vows
I could gain as I did in Grendel's day.
But fire in this fight I must fear me now,
and poisonous breath; so I bring with me
breastplate and board.[1] From the barrow's keeper
no footbreadth flee I.[2] One fight shall end
our war by the wall, as Wyrd allots,
all mankind's master. My mood is bold
but forbears to boast o'er this battling-flyer.
— Now abide by the barrow, ye breastplate-mailed,
ye heroes in harness, which of us twain
better from battle-rush bear his wounds.
Wait ye the finish. The fight is not yours,

[1] Shield. [2] The same phrase is used by Leofsunu at *Maldon*.

nor meet for any but me alone
to measure might with this monster here
and play the hero. Hardily I
shall win that wealth, or war shall seize,
cruel killing, your king and lord!"
Up stood then with shield the sturdy champion,
stayed by the strength of his single manhood,
and hardy 'neath helmet his harness bore
under cleft of the cliffs: no coward's path!
Soon spied by the wall that warrior chief,
survivor of many a victory-field
where foemen fought with furious clashings,
an arch of stone; and within, a stream
that broke from the barrow. The brooklet's wave
was hot with fire. The hoard that way
he never could hope unharmed to near,
or endure those deeps,[1] for the dragon's flame.
Then let from his breast, for he burst with rage,
the Weder-Geat prince a word outgo;
stormed the stark-heart; stern went ringing
and clear his cry 'neath the cliff-rocks gray.
The hoard-guard heard a human voice;
his rage was enkindled. No respite now
for pact of peace! The poison-breath
of that foul worm first came forth from the cave,
hot reek-of-fight: the rocks resounded.
Stout by the stone-way his shield he raised,
lord of the Geats, against the loathed-one;
while with courage keen that coiléd foe
came seeking strife. The sturdy king
had drawn his sword, not dull of edge,

[1] The hollow passage.

heirloom old; and each of the two
felt fear of his foe, though fierce their mood.
Stoutly stood with his shield high-raised
the warrior king, as the worm now coiled
together amain: the mailed-one waited.
Now, spire by spire, fast sped and glided
that blazing serpent. The shield protected
soul and body a shorter while
for the hero-king than his heart desired,[1]
could his will have wielded the welcome respite
but once in his life! But Wyrd denied it,
and victory's honors. — His arm he lifted,
lord of the Geats, the grim foe smote
with atheling's heirloom. Its edge was turned,
brown[2]-blade, on the bone, and bit more feebly
than its noble master had need of then
in his baleful stress. — Then the barrow's keeper
waxed full wild for that weighty blow,
cast deadly flames; wide drove and far
those vicious fires. No victor's glory
the Geats' lord boasted; his brand had failed,
naked in battle, as never it should,
excellent iron! — 'Twas no easy path
that Ecgtheow's honored heir must tread
over the plain to the place of the foe;
for against his will he must win a home

[1] By another interpretation, the following lines would read —

> what time it was fated first in his life
> that Wyrd would not will him to wield at all
> victory's honors.

[2] See note to v. 1546; and for the "biting," v. 1455. For the seemingly sarcastic note of "excellent" in v. 2586, see note to v. 644.

elsewhere far, as must all men, leaving
this lapsing life! — Not long it was
ere those champions grimly closed again.
The hoard-guard was heartened; high heaved his breast
once more; and by peril was pressed again,
enfolded in flames, the folk-commander!
Nor yet about him his band of comrades,
sons of athelings, arméd stood
with warlike front: to the woods they bent them,
their lives to save.[1] But the soul of one
with care was cumbered. Kinship true
can never be marred in a noble mind!

XXXVI

Wiglaf his name was, Weohstan's son,
linden-thane loved, the lord of Scylfings,[2]
Ælfhere's kinsman. His king he now saw
with heat under helmet hard oppressed.
He minded the prizes his prince had given him,

[1] In 2532 the thanes were told to await the finish. Either this is conventional blame of coward retainers; or else the thanes are supposed to fly from their place where Beowulf stationed them, when they ought to have disregarded his instructions and helped. Beowulf's other band waited for him by the uncanny and blood-stained mere. In Saxo (Bk. IX, Holder, p. 302) Ragnar fights two huge serpents, who try to crush him and kill him with their poison. He has no comrades; but the men of the court in that land fly to hiding-places and watch the fight "like scared girls."

[2] As noted above to v. 2151, Weohstan was a kinsman of Hygelac and Beowulf, but had taken service under the Swedish king Onela, killing the rebel Eanmund and winning his weapons and armor. When Eadgils, Eanmund's brother, succeeds to the Swedish throne, Weohstan returns to his own kindred. Evidently he makes his peace, gets the family estates, and leaves them to his son Wiglaf. (Gering, p. 119.)

wealthy seat of the Wægmunding line,
and folk-rights that his father owned.
Not long he lingered. The linden yellow,
his shield, he seized; the old sword he drew: —
as heirloom of Eanmund earth-dwellers knew it,
who was slain by the sword-edge, son of Ohtere,
friendless exile, erst in fray
killed by Weohstan, who won for his kin
brown-bright helmet, breastplate ringed,
old sword of Eotens, Onela's gift,
weeds of war of the warrior-thane,
battle-gear brave: though a brother's child
had been felled, the feud was unfelt by Onela.[1]
For winters this war-gear Weohstan kept,
breastplate and board, till his bairn had grown
earlship to earn as the old sire did:
then he gave him, mid Geats, the gear of battle,
portion huge, when he passed from life,
fared agéd forth. For the first time now
with his leader-lord the liegeman young
was bidden to share the shock of battle.
Neither softened his soul, nor the sire's bequest
weakened in war.[2] So the worm found out

[1] That is, although Eanmund was brother's son to Onela, the slaying of the former by Weohstan is not felt as cause of feud, and is rewarded by gift of the slain man's weapons.

[2] Both Wiglaf and the sword did their duty. — The following is one of the classic passages for illustrating the *comitatus* as the most conspicuous Germanic institution, and its underlying sense of duty, based partly on the idea of loyalty and partly on the practical basis of benefits received and repaid. It should be read along with the wholly admirable companion portions of *The Fight at Maldon*, as well as the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard in the *Chronicle*. Historical song and epic strike the same note; and the testimony of Tacitus (*Germania*, c. xiv) is warm

when once in fight the foes had met!
Wiglaf spake, — and his words were sage;
sad in spirit, he said to his comrades: —
"I remember the time,[1] when mead we took,

with praise and admiration of Germanic loyalty among the warriors of the first and second centuries. Cæsar, as one would expect, looks at the institution from a practical military man's point of view.

[1] See the famous talk of Biarco and Hialto which Saxo (Bk. II, Holder, pp. 59 f.) says he got from "an old Danish song." In Elton's translation Hialto says: "Sweet it is to repay the gifts received from our lord . . . let us do with brave hearts all the things that in our cups we boasted . . . let us keep the vows which we swore. . . ." And Biarco (Bjarki): "I will die overpowered near the head of my slain Captain, and at his feet thou also shalt slip on thy face in death, so that whoso scans the piled corpses may see in what wise we rate the gold our lord gave us!" — As to "remembering the mead," see *Finnsburg*, vv. 39 ff. The very words of Wiglaf, however, are echoed in *Maldon* by Ælfwine, as the faithful thane exhorts his comrades to fight on nor forsake their slain lord.

> "Remember what time at the mead we talked,
> when on the benches our boasts we made,
> heroes in hall, of the hard encounter:
> now may be kenned whose courage avails!
> I will my kinship make clear to all,
> that I was in Mercia of mighty race.
> My agéd father was Ealhelm named. . . .
> None of the lords of my land shall taunt me
> I was fain from this field to flee away,
> my life to save now my lord lies dead,
> all hewn in combat, — my cruelest grief:
> for he was my kinsman and captain both."

Offa exhorted in the same vein; and then —

> Leofsunu spake and lifted his shield: —
> "This is my hest that hence I flee not
> a footbreadth's space, but will further go
> to revenge in fight my friend-and-lord.
> Nor need at Sturmere steadfast thanes
> jeer and taunt that I journeyed home,
> when my liege had fallen, a lordless man."

what promise we made to this prince of ours
in the banquet-hall, to our breaker-of-rings,
for gear of combat to give him requital,
for hard-sword and helmet, if hap should bring
stress of this sort! Himself who chose us
from all his army to aid him now,
urged us to glory, and gave these treasures,
because he counted us keen with the spear
and hardy 'neath helm, though this hero-work
our leader hoped unhelped and alone
to finish for us, — folk-defender
who hath got him glory greater than all men
for daring deeds! Now the day is come
that our noble master has need of the might
of warriors stout. Let us stride along
the hero to help while the heat is about him
glowing and grim! For God is my witness
I am far more fain the fire should seize
along with my lord these limbs of mine![1]
Unsuiting[2] it seems our shields to bear

A valuable survival of this taunting of men who broke the oath of loyalty is the cry of the sworn-brother in *Bewick and Graham:* —

> In every town that I ride through,
> They'll say — "There rides a brotherless man!"

That is, there is one who has done to death his sworn-brother.

With these speeches of the Maldon warriors and of Wiglaf one may compare the awkward but effective prose which reports the answer of Cynewulf's thanes to the conquering band of Cyneheard. They resist all bribes and entreaties to quit their dead master and king, and fall beside him. The account is perhaps based on an old lay. — See *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 755.

[1] Sc. "than to bide safely here," — a common figure of incomplete comparison.

[2] Unusually deliberate understatement, indicating the excess of shame and disgrace.

homeward hence, save here we essay
to fell the foe and defend the life
of the Weders' lord. I wot 'twere shame
on the law of our land[1] if alone the king
out of Geatish warriors woe endured
and sank in the struggle! My sword and helmet,
breastplate and board, for us both shall serve!"
Through slaughter-reek strode he to succor his chieftain,
his battle-helm bore, and brief words spake: —
"Beowulf dearest, do all bravely,
as in youthful days of yore thou vowedst
that while life should last thou wouldst let no wise
thy glory droop! Now, great in deeds,
atheling steadfast, with all thy strength
shield thy life! I will stand to help thee."
At the words the worm came once again,
murderous monster mad with rage,
with fire-billows flaming, its foes to seek,
the hated men. In heat-waves burned
that board[2] to the boss, and the breastplate failed
to shelter at all the spear-thane young.
Yet quickly under his kinsman's shield
went eager the earl, since his own was now
all burned by the blaze. The bold king again
had mind of his glory: with might his glaive
was driven into the dragon's head, —
blow nerved by hate. But Nægling[3] was shivered,

[1] Custom, tradition, — one of the *boni mores* which, Tacitus says, counts for so much more than law. [2] Wiglaf's wooden shield.

[3] Gering would translate "kinsman of the nail," as both are made of iron. — What is said here of Beowulf's excessive strength, like the former mention of his early slackness, is a legendary trait of Offa

broken in battle was Beowulf's sword,
old and gray. 'Twas granted him not
that ever the edge of iron at all
could help him at strife: too strong was his hand,
so the tale is told, and he tried too far
with strength of stroke all swords he wielded,
though sturdy their steel: they steaded him nought.
Then for the third time thought on its feud
that folk-destroyer, fire-dread dragon,
and rushed on the hero, where room allowed,
battle-grim, burning; its bitter teeth
closed on his neck, and covered him
with waves of blood from his breast that welled.

XXXVII

'Twas now, men say, in his sovran's need
that the earl made known his noble strain,
craft and keenness and courage enduring.
Heedless of harm,[1] though his hand was burned,
hardy-hearted, he helped his kinsman.
A little lower[2] the loathsome beast

the elder, the Uffo of Saxo Grammaticus. This excess of strength is a favorite trait in certain lines of romance, runs into exaggeration, and lends itself to burlesque. In *Hugh Spencer's Feats in France*, a poor popular ballad, the hero cannot tilt with any one French lance, his strength smashing it in his hand; and he is accommodated only when a dozen lances are bound into one.

[1] Literally, "heeded not head," — either his own ("heedless of head and limbs" translates Gering), or else the dragon's: "nor feared the flame from the beast's jaws," — which is less likely.

[2] As in other fights with a dragon, the monster is killed by a blow underneath its body where no scales protect it. Saxo's Frotho, succeeding to a depleted treasury, is told by a "native" about a dragon (*serpens*) who guards a mount (*montis possessor*) full of treasure. Its poison is deadly. Frotho must not seek to pierce its scales, but "there is a place

he smote with sword; his steel drove in
bright and burnished; that blaze began
to lose and lessen. At last the king
wielded his wits again, war-knife drew,
a biting blade by his breastplate hanging,[1]
and the Weders'-helm smote that worm asunder,
felled the foe, flung forth its life.[2]
So had they killed it, kinsmen both,
athelings twain: thus an earl should be
in danger's day! — Of deeds of valor
this conqueror's-hour of the king was last,
of his work in the world. The wound began,
which that dragon-of-earth had erst inflicted,
to swell and smart; and soon he found
in his breast was boiling, baleful and deep,
pain of poison. The prince walked on,
wise in his thought, to the wall of rock;
then sat, and stared at the structure of giants,
where arch of stone and steadfast column
upheld forever that hall in earth.
Yet here must the hand of the henchman peerless
lave with water his winsome lord,
the king and conqueror covered with blood,
with struggle spent, and unspan his helmet.
Beowulf spake in spite of his hurt,

under its belly" where his sword can thrust and kill. — Saxo, Bk. II (Holder, p. 38). Much the same is told of another king who slays the serpent that guards an "underground room." Bk. VI (Holder, p. 181).

[1] In the ballads this useful dagger or short sword is often a "wee penknife that hangs low down by the gare"; but the wee penknife now and then is described as "three-quarters [of a yard] long."

[2] As in all the adventures described by our poet, the actual climax and decisive part of the fight is told in briefest fashion.

his mortal wound; full well he knew
his portion now was past and gone
of earthly bliss, and all had fled
of his file of days, and death was near:
"I would fain bestow on son of mine
this gear of war, were given me now
that any heir should after me come
of my proper blood. This people I ruled
fifty winters. No folk-king was there,
none at all, of the neighboring clans
who war would wage me with 'warriors'-friends'[1]
and threat me with horrors. At home I bided
what fate might come, and I cared for mine own;
feuds I sought not, nor falsely swore
ever on oath. For all these things,
though fatally wounded, fain am I![2]
From the Ruler-of-Man no wrath shall seize me,
when life from my frame must flee away,
for killing of kinsmen! Now quickly go

[1] That is, swords. See v. 1810, above. "Friend-of-war" would be a more exact translation of the kenning.

[2] "With a joyful spirit, I Sir Richard Grenville, die." "I am no sinner," says Beowulf, "and die a glad man." This mood of the happy warrior in death has had less clerical correction than occurred in a similar situation in *The Fight at Maldon*. Byrhtnoth, dying on the field, looks up to heaven and says: —

> "I praise and thank thee, Prince of Nations,
> for all the bliss this earth has brought me!
> Now, Merciful Maker, is most my need
> that thou good speed to my spirit give,
> and let my soul to thee safely come,
> pass in peace to thy power and keeping,
> Prince of Angels! I pray thee well
> that it get no harm from hell's destroyers."

For the unmixed note of exultation we turn to the pagan Norsemen.

and gaze on that hoard 'neath the hoary rock,
Wiglaf loved, now the worm lies low,
sleeps, heart-sore, of his spoil bereaved.
And fare in haste. I would fain behold
the gorgeous heirlooms, golden store,
have joy in the jewels and gems, lay down
softlier for sight of this splendid hoard
my life and the lordship I long have held."

XXXVIII

I have heard that swiftly the son of Weohstan
at wish and word of his wounded king, —
war-sick warrior, — woven mail-coat,
battle-sark, bore 'neath the barrow's roof.[1]
Then the clansman keen, of conquest proud,
passing the seat,[2] saw store of jewels
and glistening gold the ground along;
by the wall were marvels, and many a vessel
in the den of the dragon, the dawn-flier old:
unburnished bowls of bygone men
reft of richness; rusty helms
of the olden age; and arm-rings many
wondrously woven. — Such wealth of gold,
booty from barrow, can burden with pride
each human wight: let him hide it who will! —
His glance too fell on a gold-wove banner

[1] It is a common feature of Anglo-Saxon poetical style that the movements of prominent persons are described in this way. So v. 405, "Beowulf *spake*, — on him the breastplate glittered," etc. Hence, instead of the word "to go," the poet takes phrases like "bore his armor," "bore sword and shield." In translations such as "went protected by his armor" (Gering), the stylistic feature is lost.

[2] Where Beowulf lay.

high o'er the hoard, of handiwork noblest,
brilliantly broidered; so bright its gleam,
all the earth-floor he easily saw
and viewed all these vessels. No vestige now
was seen of the serpent: the sword had ta'en him.
Then, I heard, the hill of its hoard was reft,
old work of giants, by one alone;
he burdened his bosom with beakers and plate
at his own good will, and the ensign took,
brightest of beacons. — The blade of his lord
— its edge was iron [1] — had injured deep
one that guarded the golden hoard
many a year and its murder-fire
spread hot round the barrow in horror-billows
at midnight hour, till it met its doom.
Hasted the herald, the hoard so spurred him
his track to retrace; he was troubled by doubt,
high-souled hero, if haply he'd find
alive, where he left him, the lord of Weders,
weakening fast by the wall of the cave.
So he carried the load. His lord and king
he found all bleeding, famous chief,
at the lapse of life. The liegeman again
plashed him with water, till point of word
broke through the breast-hoard. Beowulf spake,
sage and sad, as he stared at the gold: —
" For the gold and treasure, to God my thanks,
to the Wielder-of-Wonders, with words I say,
for what I behold, to Heaven's Lord,

[1] The formula doubtless had come down from days when, as Tacitus says, metals were rare among the Germans and iron had to be imported. The whole passage is a variant of vv. 2771 (*b*) f. Wiglaf took all this treasure without fear of interruption, for the warden of it was killed.

for the grace that I give such gifts to my folk
or ever the day of my death be run!
Now I've bartered here for booty of treasure
the last of my life, so look ye well
to the needs of my land! No longer I tarry.
A barrow bid ye the battle-famed raise
for my ashes. 'Twill shine by the shore of the flood,
to folk of mine memorial fair
on Hronës Headland high uplifted,
that ocean-wanderers oft may hail
Beowulf's Barrow, as back from far[1]
they drive their keels o'er the darkling wave."
From his neck he unclasped the collar of gold,
valorous king, to his vassal gave it
with bright-gold helmet, breastplate, and ring,
to the youthful thane: bade him use them in joy.
"Thou art end and remnant of all our race,
the Wægmunding name. For Wyrd hath swept them,
all my line, to the land of doom,
earls in their glory: I after them go."
This word was the last which the wise old man
harbored in heart ere hot death-waves
of balefire he chose. From his bosom fled
his soul to seek the saints' reward.[2]

[1] Besides the Germanic Yngwar, who was buried by the sea, there are famous classical cases. Achilles had his tomb "high on a jutting headland over wide Hellespont, that it might be seen from far off the sea by men that now are and by those that shall be hereafter." So the *Odyssey*, in Butcher and Lang's translation of the last book. In Book XI, Elpenor asks for such a tomb. According to Vergil, *Æn.* VI, 232, Misenus was buried by Æneas on a huge mound on a cliff by the sea.

[2] A Christian term, — "the splendid state of the redeemed, of the martyrs," — heaven.

XXXIX

It was heavy hap for that hero young
on his lord beloved to look and find him
lying on earth with life at end,
sorrowful sight. But the slayer too,
awful earth-dragon, empty of breath,
lay felled in fight, nor, fain of its treasure,
could the writhing monster rule it more.
For edges of iron had ended its days,
hard and battle-sharp, hammers' leaving;[1]
and that flier-afar had fallen to ground
hushed by its hurt, its hoard all near,
no longer lusty aloft to whirl
at midnight, making its merriment seen,
proud of its prizes: prone it sank
by the handiwork of the hero-king.
Forsooth among folk but few[2] achieve,
— though sturdy and strong, as stories tell me,
and never so daring in deed of valor, —
the perilous breath of a poison-foe
to brave, and to rush on the ring-hoard hall,
whenever his watch the warden keeps
bold in the barrow. Beowulf paid
the price of death for that precious hoard;
and each of the foes had found the end
of this fleeting life.
Befell erelong
that the laggards in war the wood had left,

[1] What had been left or made by the hammer; well-forged.
[2] As usual, litotes for "none at all."

trothbreakers, cowards,[1] ten together,
fearing before to flourish a spear
in the sore distress of their sovran lord.
Now in their shame their shields they carried,
armor of fight, where the old man lay;
and they gazed on Wiglaf. Wearied he sat
at his sovran's shoulder, shieldsman good,
to wake him with water.[2] Nowise it availed.
Though well he wished it, in world no more
could he barrier life for that leader-of-battles
nor baffle the will of all-wielding God.
Doom of the Lord was law o'er the deeds
of every man, as it is to-day.
Grim was the answer, easy to get,
from the youth for those that had yielded to fear!
Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan,—
mournful he looked on those men unloved: —
"Who sooth will speak, can say indeed
that the ruler who gave you golden rings
and the harness of war in which ye stand
— for he at ale-bench often-times
bestowed on hall-folk helm and breastplate,
lord to liegemen, the likeliest gear
which near or far he could find to give, —
threw away and wasted these weeds of battle,
on men who failed when the foemen came!

[1] In *Maldon* the antitype of cowardice and false thaneship is furnished by the three sons of Odda, — Godric, who mounts his lord's own horse when the chieftain falls, and flies to the woods and the fastness, Godwine, and Godwig. They will not stay to fall about their lord's body, faithful in death, as do the rest.

[2] Trying to revive him. In the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis*, water "wakes" land into fertility.

Not at all could the king of his comrades-in-arms
venture to vaunt, though the Victory-Wielder,
God, gave him grace that he got revenge
sole with his sword in stress and need.
To rescue his life, 'twas little that I
could serve him in struggle ; yet shift I made
(hopeless it seemed) to help my kinsman.
Its strength ever waned, when with weapon I struck
that fatal foe, and the fire less strongly
flowed from its head. — Too few the heroes
in throe of contest that thronged to our king !
Now gift of treasure and girding of sword,
joy of the house and home-delight
shall fail your folk; his freehold-land
every clansman within your kin
shall lose and leave, when lords highborn
hear afar of that flight of yours,
a fameless deed. Yea, death is better
for liegemen all than a life of shame ! "

XL

That battle-toil bade he at burg to announce,
at the fort on the cliff, where, full of sorrow,
all the morning earls had sat,
daring shieldsmen, in doubt of twain:
would they wail as dead, or welcome home,
their lord belovéd ? Little[1] kept back
of the tidings new, but told them all,
the herald that up the headland rode. —
"Now the willing-giver to Weder folk

[1] Nothing.

in death-bed lies, the Lord of Geats
on the slaughter-bed sleeps by the serpent's deed!
And beside him is stretched that slayer-of-men
with knife-wounds sick:[1] no sword availed
on the awesome thing in any wise
to work a wound. There Wiglaf sitteth,
Weohstan's bairn, by Beowulf's side,
the living earl by the other dead,
and heavy of heart a head-watch[2] keeps
o'er friend and foe. — Now our folk may look
for waging of war when once unhidden
to Frisian and Frank the fall of the king
is spread afar. — The strife began
when hot on the Hugas[3] Hygelac fell
and fared with his fleet to the Frisian land.
Him there the Hetwaras humbled in war,
plied with such prowess their power o'erwhelming
that the bold-in-battle bowed beneath it
and fell in fight. To his friends no wise
could that earl give treasure! And ever since
the Merowings' favor has failed us wholly.[4]
Nor aught expect I of peace and faith
from Swedish folk. 'Twas spread afar
how Ongentheow reft at Ravenswood
Hæthcyn Hrethling of hope and life,

[1] Dead. [2] Death-watch, guard of honor, "lyke-wake."

[3] A name for the Franks. — "The fleet" (literally "fleet-army") marks a viking's raid; but does not make necessarily for the argument that Geats were Swedes. An expedition by boat from Jutland, using the large rivers for quick piratical assaults and plunderings, is likely enough.

[4] The Hetwaras (see v. 2363, above) were subordinate to the Frankish or Merovingian line founded by Chlodowech (Clovis), whose grandson Theudebert was in command of the forces which routed Hygelac's army.

when the folk of Geats for the first time sought
in wanton pride the Warlike-Scylfings.
Soon the sage old sire[1] of Ohtere,
ancient and awful, gave answering blow;
the sea-king[2] he slew, and his spouse redeemed,
his good wife rescued, though robbed of her gold,
mother of Ohtere and Onela.
Then he followed his foes, who fled before him
sore beset and stole their way,
bereft of a ruler, to Ravenswood.
With his host he besieged there what swords had left,
the weary and wounded; woes he threatened
the whole night through to that hard-pressed throng:
some with the morrow his sword should kill,
some should go to the gallows-tree
for rapture of ravens. But rescue came
with dawn of day for those desperate men
when they heard the horn of Hygelac sound,
tones of his trumpet; the trusty king
had followed their trail with faithful band.

XLI

"The bloody swath of Swedes and Geats
and the storm of their strife, were seen afar,
how folk against folk the fight had wakened.
The ancient king with his atheling band
sought his citadel, sorrowing much:
Ongentheow earl went up to his burg.
He had tested Hygelac's hardihood,
the proud one's prowess, would prove it no longer,

[1] Ongentheow. — This episode has been explained above, note to v. 2477.
[2] Hæthcyn.

defied no more those fighting-wanderers
nor hoped from the seamen to save his hoard,
his bairn and his bride : so he bent him again,
old, to his earth-walls. Yet after him came
with slaughter for Swedes the standards of Hygelac
o'er peaceful plains in pride advancing,
till Hrethelings fought in the fencéd town.[1]
Then Ongentheow with edge of sword,
the hoary-bearded, was held at bay,
and the folk-king there was forced to suffer
Eofor's anger. In ire, at the king
Wulf Wonreding with weapon struck ;
and the chieftain's blood, for that blow, in streams
flowed 'neath his hair. No fear felt he,
stout old Scylfing, but straightway repaid
in better bargain that bitter stroke
and faced his foe with fell intent.
Nor swift enough was the son of Wonred
answer to render the agéd chief ;
too soon on his head the helm was cloven ;
blood-bedecked he bowed to earth,
and fell adown : not doomed was he yet,
and well he waxed, though the wound was sore.
Then the hardy Hygelac-thane,[2]
when his brother fell, with broad brand smote,
giants'-sword crashing through giants'-helm

[1] The line may mean : till Hrethelings stormed on the hedgéd shields, — *i.e.* the shield-wall or hedge of defensive war. — Hrethelings, of course, are Geats.

[2] Eofor, brother to Wulf Wonreding. As was noted above, this Homeric account of the fight is not difficult to follow. Wulf wounds Ongentheow, who replies with a terrific stroke, felling Wulf to earth, but not killing him. Eofor, the brother, avenges Wulf speedily, and gets his reward for killing the old hero-king.

across the shield-wall: sank the king,
his folk's old herdsman, fatally hurt.
There were many to bind the brother's wounds
and lift him, fast as fate allowed
his people to wield the place-of-war.
But Eofor took from Ongentheow,
earl from other, the iron-breastplate,
hard sword hilted, and helmet too,
and the hoar-chief's harness to Hygelac carried,
who took the trappings, and truly promised
rich fee 'mid folk,[1] — and fulfilled it so.
For that grim strife gave the Geatish lord,
Hrethel's offspring, when home he came,
to Eofor and Wulf a wealth of treasure.
Each of them had a hundred thousand[2]
in land and linked rings; nor at less price reckoned
mid-earth men such mighty deeds!
And to Eofor he gave his only daughter
in pledge of grace, the pride of his home.

"Such is the feud, the foeman's rage,
death-hate of men: so I deem it sure
that the Swedish folk will seek us home
for this fall of their friends, the fighting-Scylfings,[3]
when once they learn that our warrior leader
lifeless lies, who land and hoard
ever defended from all his foes,

[1] Conjectural but obvious reading, with the general sense of "open" — public, prominent.

[2] Sc. "value in" hides and the weight of the gold. See note on v. 2195, above.

[3] Transposed from its place as v. 3005, and reading "Scylfings" for the "Scyldings" of the *Ms*. Then no gap need be assumed.

furthered his folk's weal, finished his course
a hardy hero. — Now haste is best,
that we go to gaze on our Geatish lord,
and bear the bountiful breaker-of-rings
to the funeral pyre. No fragments merely
shall burn with the warrior.[1] Wealth of jewels,
gold untold and gained in terror,
treasure at last with his life obtained,
all of that booty the brands shall take,
fire shall eat it. No earl must carry
memorial jewel. No maiden fair
shall wreathe her neck with noble ring:
nay, sad in spirit and shorn of her gold,
oft shall she pass o'er paths of exile
now our lord all laughter has laid aside,
all mirth and revel. Many a spear
morning-cold shall be clasped amain,
lifted aloft; nor shall lilt of harp
those warriors wake; but the wan-hued raven,[2]
fain o'er the fallen, his feast shall praise
and boast to the eagle how bravely he ate
when he and the wolf were wasting the slain."

So he told his sorrowful tidings,
and little[3] he lied, the loyal man
of word or of work. The warriors rose;

[1] Beowulf was glad he had won such treasure for his folk, v. 2794, above. Earls and maids should be glad for it. But the herald, who foresees for earl and maid another fate — exile for one, and death in battle after surprise at dawn (or is it that the spear shall be found clasped by a cold, dead hand?) for the other — will heap all the treasure in the tomb. Compare the treasures for Scyld's ship-burial.

[2] See *Finnsburg*, vv. 6, 36.

[3] Not at all.

sad, they climbed to the Cliff-of-Eagles,
went, welling with tears, the wonder to view.
Found on the sand there, stretched at rest,
their lifeless lord, who had lavished rings
of old upon them. Ending-day
had dawned on the doughty-one ; death had seized
in woful slaughter the Weders' king.
There saw they, besides, the strangest being,
loathsome, lying their leader near,
prone on the field. The fiery dragon,
fearful fiend, with flame was scorched.
Reckoned by feet, it was fifty measures
in length as it lay. Aloft erewhile
it had revelled by night, and anon come back,
seeking its den; now in death's sure clutch
it had come to the end of its earth-hall joys.
By it there stood the stoups and jars ;
dishes lay there, and dear-decked swords
eaten with rust, as, on earth's lap resting,
a thousand winters they waited there.
For all that heritage huge, that gold
of bygone men, was bound by a spell,[1]
so the treasure-hall could be touched by none
of human kind, — save[2] that Heaven's King,
God himself, might give whom he would,
Helper of Heroes, the hoard to open, —
even such a man as seemed to him meet.

[1] Laid on it when it was put in the barrow. This spell, or in our days the "curse," either prevented discovery or brought dire ills on the finder and taker. The Nibelungs' gold is cited by Holthausen as a case in point. — See below, v. 3069.

[2] One of our poet's mild "riders" to correct obvious remains of gentilism.

XLII

A perilous path, it proved, he [1] trod
who heinously hid, that hall within,
wealth under wall! Its watcher had killed
one of a few,[2] and the feud was avenged
in woful fashion. Wondrous seems it,
what manner a man of might and valor
oft ends his life, when the earl no longer
in mead-hall may live with loving friends.
So Beowulf, when that barrow's warden
he sought, and the struggle; himself knew not
in what wise he should wend from the world at last.
For [3] princes potent, who placed the gold,
with a curse to doomsday covered it deep,
so that marked with sin the man should be,
hedged with horrors, in hell-bonds fast,
racked with plagues, who should rob their hoard.
Yet no greed for gold, but the grace of heaven,
ever the king had kept in view.[4]
Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan: —
"At the mandate of one, oft warriors many
sorrow must suffer; and so must we.
The people's-shepherd showed not aught

[1] Probably the fugitive is meant who discovered the hoard. Ten Brink and Gering assume that the dragon is meant. "Hid" (the *Ms.* reading) may well mean here "took while in hiding."

[2] That is, "one and a few others." But Beowulf seems to be indicated.

[3] Ten Brink points out the strongly heathen character of this part of the epic. Beowulf's end came, so the old tradition ran, from his unwitting interference with spell-bound treasure.

[4] A hard saying, variously interpreted. In any case, it is the somewhat clumsy effort of the Christian poet to tone down the heathenism of his material by an edifying observation.

of care for our counsel, king belovéd !
That guardian of gold he should grapple not, urged we,
but let him lie where he long had been
in his earth-hall waiting the end of the world,
the hest of heaven. — This hoard is ours,
but grievously gotten ; too grim the fate
which thither carried our king and lord.
I was within there, and all I viewed,
the chambered treasure, when chance allowed me
(and my path was made in no pleasant wise)
under the earth-wall. Eager, I seized
such heap from the hoard as hands could bear
and hurriedly carried it hither back
to my liege and lord. Alive was he still,
still wielding his wits. The wise old man
spake much in his sorrow, and sent you greetings
and bade that ye build, when he breathed no more,
on the place of his balefire a barrow high,
memorial mighty. Of men was he
worthiest warrior wide earth o'er
the while he had joy of his jewels and burg.
Let us set out in haste now, the second time
to see and search this store of treasure,
these wall-hid wonders, — the way I show you, —
where, gathered near, ye may gaze your fill
at broad-gold and rings. Let the bier, soon made,
be all in order when out we come,
our king and captain to carry thither
— man beloved — where long he shall bide
safe in the shelter of sovran God."
Then the bairn of Weohstan bade command,
hardy chief, to heroes many

that owned their homesteads, hither to bring
firewood from far — o'er the folk they ruled —
for the famed-one's funeral. "Fire shall devour
and wan flames feed on the fearless warrior
who oft stood stout in the iron-shower,
when, sped from the string, a storm of arrows
shot o'er the shield-wall: the shaft held firm,
featly feathered, followed the barb." [1]
And now the sage young son of Weohstan
seven chose of the chieftain's thanes,
the best he found that band within,
and went with these warriors, one of eight,
under hostile roof. In hand one bore
a lighted torch and led the way.
No lots they cast for keeping the hoard
when once the warriors saw it in hall,
altogether without a guardian,
lying there lost. And little they mourned
when they had hastily haled it out,
dear-bought treasure! The dragon they cast,
the worm, o'er the wall for the wave to take,
and surges swallowed that shepherd of gems.
Then the woven gold on a wain was laden —
countless quite! — and the king was borne,
hoary hero, to Hronës-Ness.

XLIII

Then [2] fashioned for him the folk of Geats
firm on the earth a funeral-pile,

[1] Professor Garnett's translation.

[2] The construction of the poem is certainly strengthened by this dignified close, which corresponds in theme to the opening lines.

and hung it with helmets and harness of war
and breastplates bright, as the boon he asked;
and they laid amid it the mighty chieftain,
heroes mourning their master dear.
Then on the hill that hugest of balefires
the warriors wakened. Wood-smoke rose
black over blaze, and blent was the roar
of flame with weeping (the wind was still),
till the fire had broken the frame of bones,
hot at the heart. In heavy mood
their misery moaned they, their master's death.
Wailing her woe, the widow [1] old,
her hair upbound, for Beowulf's death
sung in her sorrow, and said full oft
she dreaded the doleful days to come,
deaths enow, and doom of battle,
and shame. — The smoke by the sky was devoured.
The folk of the Weders fashioned there
on the headland a barrow broad and high,
by ocean-farers far descried:
in ten days' time their toil had raised it,
the battle-brave's beacon. Round brands of the pyre
a wall they built, the worthiest ever
that wit could prompt in their wisest men.
They placed in the barrow that precious booty,
the rounds and the rings they had reft erewhile,

[1] Compare the account of Hildeburh at her brother's funeral, above, vv. 1114 ff. Nothing is said of Beowulf's wife in the poem, but Bugge — whose restoration of the text is followed here — surmises that Beowulf finally accepted Hygd's offer of kingdom and hoard, and, as was usual, took her into the bargain. In any case a *praefica* (with differences) belonged to the Germanic funeral, and chanted her *vocero*. Specimens of these laments, which often, as here, expressed forebodings for the future, may be found in the present writer's *Beginnings of Poetry*.

hardy heroes, from hoard in cave, —
trusting the ground with treasure of earls,
gold in the earth, where ever it lies
useless to men as of yore it was.

Then about that barrow the battle-keen rode,[1]
atheling-born, a band of twelve,
lament to make, to mourn their king,
chant their dirge, and their chieftain honor.
They praised his earlship, his acts of prowess
worthily witnessed: and well it is
that men their master-friend mightily laud,
heartily love, when hence he goes
from life in the body forlorn away.

Thus made their mourning the men of Geatland,
for their hero's passing his hearth-companions:
quoth that of all the kings of earth,
of men he was mildest and most belovéd,
to his kin the kindest, keenest for praise.

[1] The close resemblance of these funeral rites to the ceremonies at Attila's burial has often been noted. Jordanis, reporting them briefly — *pauca de multis dicere* — tells how the corpse was placed under a "silken tent," and how horsemen rode round it, in masterly fashion, and chanted Attila's great deeds. At the burial of Achilles "heroes of the Achaeans moved mail-clad round the pyre . . . both footmen and horse, and great was the noise that arose."

CHAPTER II

THE ATTACK ON FINNSBURG

IN contrast to the remoteness, the detached and moralizing method, of the poet of the *Beowulf*, the singer of *Finnsburg* comes to close quarters with his theme, and treats it in nervous, direct, dramatic fashion. Fragment as this is, it serves to stamp its maker as no bookman, but a minstrel, who knew how to rouse his hearers in the hall with living words. In directness of treatment, in delight of battle, it sounds the same note that one hears in the historical poems of *Maldon* and *Brunnanburh*. But it is not an historical poem like those. It is a piece of the old traditional and mainly oral epic, closely related to the legendary cycle from which the *Beowulf* derived, and resembling that poem in all essentials of style and metre. Those qualities which difference it from the *Beowulf* are mainly negative; it lacks sentiment, moralizing, the leisure of the writer; it did not attempt, probably, to cover more than a single event; and one will not err in finding it a fair type of the epic songs which roving singers were wont to chant before lord and liegemen in hall and which were used with more or less fidelity by makers of complete epic poems.

The manuscript which contained the Finnsburg fragment once belonged to the library at Lambeth Palace, but was lost some time ago. Hickes made a copy of it for his *Thesaurus*, at the beginning of the eighteenth century; and all editions are based on the copy. Hickes may have

made mistakes; the scribe is always guilty in these cases until he is proved innocent; and so arises store of controversy over textual matters in infinite detail. But the meaning and the vigor of the whole are beyond controversy.

"No gables are burning." —[1]

Then cried[2] to his band the battle-young king:
"'Tis no dawn from eastward; no dragon flies;
nor burn on this hall the hornéd gables:
but hither comes bearing *a hostile band*
its battle-gear bright:[3] the birds[4] are calling,
"gray-coat" howls,[5] and harsh dins the war-wood,[6]

[1] Despite Möller's argument that the fight here described belongs "between vv. 1145 and 1146" of *Beowulf*, that is, where Hengest and the remnant of the Danes are attacked after the battle in which Hnæf falls, the majority of scholars are surely right in regarding this part of *Finnsburg* as the story of the first attack, in which Hnæf falls. See the note to *Beowulf*, v. 1068. — Some one has called the attention of the "battle-young king" to a peculiar light, and both suggests and rejects explanations, the final one of which is preserved. The king is probably Hnæf, to whom, perhaps, Hengest speaks. They are looking out from their hall.

[2] In appeal, — a call and summons to the throng, as the chieftain notes that the strange light is that of weapons, and that his hall is singled out for a night attack. The desperate courage of chief and clansmen surprised in a hall or within the usual house-defences was a favorite theme in Germanic verse, corresponding to the frequency of the situation in actual life. One thinks of the splendid close of the *Nibelungen-Lay* as the masterpiece in its kind. Bugge points out the resemblance of the situation to that described in the Saga of Hrolf Kraki.

[3] Conjectural half-verses supplied by Grein to mend the broken rhythmical scheme.

[4] Birds of the battle-field, who follow the army in anticipation of fight, and feast on the slain. See *Beowulf*, above, vv. 3024 ff.; the famous passage in *Brunnanburh*, vv. 60 ff.; and *Elene*, vv. 111 f. (with J. Grimm's note).

[5] The wolf; see preceding references. Some editors make "gray-coat" the "gray coat-of-mail," after *Beowulf*, v. 334.

[6] The spear. — The personification of this and kindred passages should

shield answers shaft. Yon shines the moon
full from the clouds ; and foul deeds rise
to whelm this people with peril and death.
But waken ye now, warriors mine ;
seize your shields, be steadfast in valor,
fight at the front, and fearless bide ! "
Then rose *from rest, with ready courage*,[1]
many gold-decked thanes, and girt them with swords.
Then went to the door those warriors doughty,
Sigeferth[2] and Eawa, swords they drew;
to the other entrance, Ordlaf and Guthlaf,[3]
whom Hengest himself all hastily followed.
Yet with Garulf[4] pleaded Guthere then
to draw no sword[5] at the door of the hall
nor risk at first rush his royal life
where the rugged-in-war[6] would wrest it from him.

not be prosed into " rattled on," or " clashed," instead of " spoke." Compare the passage (*Andreas*, 442) describing an ocean storm, where " The billow oft answered, one wave the other."

[1] Conjectural, to mend a deficient line.

[2] See below, v. 26, and *Widsith*, v. 31, where he appears as Sæferth.

[3] See *Beowulf*, 1148, where the two are mentioned, Ordlaf appearing as Oslaf. Later they return to Frisian land and help to take vengeance on Finn. Gering points out that the names are " good Norse."

[4] Garulf and Guthere are Frisians of the attacking party ; one of them asks the other not to risk life in the first desperate onrush (Gering : in this his first battle). — Which is the petitioner ? Recently Klaeber has proposed a reading which makes Guthere the spokesman and assumes that he is uncle to Garulf. As Hagen with Patafrid in the *Waltharius*, as Hildebrand with Wolfhart in the *Nibelungen*, so here Guthere pleads with his sister's son not to risk life in the first onrush.

[5] Literally, not to carry his war-gear to the door, not to go there.

[6] Perhaps Sigeferth, whom Guthere sees at the door ; but it may simply mean that a veteran and heroic champion is sure to be at the post, and that Garulf should wait for the general engagement rather than rush on sure death.

But he[1] cried across all in no craven's voice,
hardy hero: "Who holds the door?"
"Sigeferth my name is, Secgas' prince,
wide-heralded hero: heavy my trials,
hard wars that I waged; there awaits thee now
such[2] as thyself would serve to me!"
Then din by the door[3] from death-blows sounded;
in hands of heroes were hewn the shields,
the bone-helms[4] burst; and the burg-floor groaned,
until in the grim fight Garulf fell
first of the earls of earth-dwellers there,[5]
Guthlaf's[6] son, and good men beside him.
Sank still the slain: wide circled the raven
sallow-brown, swarthy: the sword-light gleamed
as if Finn's whole burg were blazing with fire.[7]
Never heard I that worthier warring men,
conquerors sixty, more splendidly fought,
and for mead-draughts sweet such service rendered,

[1] By Klaeber's reading, Garulf.

[2] Literally, "which of the two," — life or death.

[3] *Ms.* "In the hall," with false rime, and therefore changed by editors to "by the wall."

[4] Variant of "shields" in the preceding verse.

[5] That is, as ten Brink explains, of those who dwelt in that part of the earth, — the Frisians.

[6] To avoid a clash with v. 18, above, Möller changed to Guthulf (war-wolf). Ten Brink suspects a tragic motive and retains Guthlaf. Father and son would thus be opposed and repeat the tragedy of the Hildebrand Lay.

[7] Valhalla was lighted by swords. See Uhland, *Mythus v. Thor*, p. 166. — Swords were named for their light-giving power; they shine after death of the owner, — as in the case of that sailor who has slain five and twenty dragons (*Salomon and Saturn*, 156 f.):—

> His sword well-burnished shineth yet,
> and over the barrow beam the hilts. . . .

as hero-liegemen paid Hnæf their lord!
Five days fought they *in full succession,*
five nights as well;[1] but none was slain
of those doughty warriors warding the door.

Then wended away a wounded clansman,
said that his breastplate was broken sore,
his harness hewn, his helmet pierced.
Swiftly then asked the shepherd-of-folk[2]
how the warriors all their wounds were bearing,
or which one, now, of the heroes twain[3] . . .

[1] Half-verses supplied by Möller.

[2] Hnæf is the likely chieftain to ask this question. One of his warriors has to leave the door because his armor no longer is trustworthy; and Hnæf asks the rest how they fare. Some editors, however, think it is Finn; and others prefer Hengest.

[3] Few fragments inspire more sorrow over the loss of good things than this nervous and swift-moving scene of battle.

CHAPTER III

WALDERE

FROM the famous *Waltharius*, one of the best poems of medieval times, although written in Latin hexameters by a scholar at the monastery of St. Gall as a kind of exercise in composition, we learn the story of Walter and Hiltigund as it was current early in the tenth century among the Alemannians. Probably Ekkehard, who wrote it, had his material in Latin prose; it is not now believed that the young poet translated directly from a German original. Surely, however, there were poems about Walter in the vernacular; and the present fragments in Anglo-Saxon show that the story itself was popular throughout the Germanic world. Jacob Grimm believed that Walter was originally a Gothic hero; and the connection with Attila makes for this supposition. As for the flight of the pair, the pursuit, the combats, there is reason to believe that these romantic elements are based on the old story of Heden and Hilde, runaway lovers, where Hagen is the father of the bride.

The fragments of our Anglo-Saxon epic poem — for such it probably was, and not merely a short lay — show an older form of the story than is found in Ekkehard's version. Guthhere is "friend," — that is, king, — "of the Burgundians," while for Ekkehard Guntharius has become Frank. But the story cannot have varied much in its essential facts. Attila, pictured as an amiable and

accomplished monarch, carries off hostages from sundry kingdoms of Western Europe to insure promised tribute, but gives his young captives the best of training and nurture. "Hagano," Hagen, is hostage for the Frankish king; Hererícus of Burgundy must give his daughter Hiltigund — in Anglo-Saxon, Hildeguth; while Alphere, king of Aquitania, surrenders his son Waltharius. The three grow into strength and beauty at Attila's court, treated as sons and daughter. Hagen and Walter are sworn friends — "blood-brothers." Gunther (Gunthárius; Guthhere in Anglo-Saxon) meanwhile succeeds to the Frankish throne, and Hagen escapes in order to join his master. Walter and Hiltigund, too, soon fly as a betrothed pair from Attila, taking with them treasure of great value. Gunther learns that the fugitives are in his domain, and summons his vassals to help him capture the booty and the maiden. Hagen tries to dissuade him, but goes along with the other eleven chosen companions of the king. This of course is the size of a *comitatus* for kings or heroes on particularly dangerous quests. The fugitives are overtaken. Walter chooses a good defensive ground, with rocks behind him and on both sides. Hagen again tries to prevent bloodshed, but in vain. Walter in single combat kills eight heroes who come upon him successively; among them is Hagen's sister's son, who will not desist for all his uncle's warning. Then four together come upon the heroic Walter with a curious weapon, a kind of combined trident and lasso; but three of them are killed in the attempt. Of all his foes Walter has only Gunther and his old friend Hagen left. But the old friend feels now a motive for fighting; he must revenge the killing of his sister's son. Moreover, Gunther makes the last appeal

to Hagen's loyalty ; and the hero consents, pointing out, however, that Walter must be enticed out of his impregnable fighting-place. So the king and his vassal apparently give up the battle and withdraw.

All night Walter and Hiltigund rest, and next day resume their journey. In the open Walter is attacked by both Gunther and Hagen; they fight as in ballads, for long hours ; but after all three of the combatants have suffered mutilations of the severest kind, peace is made; the woman acts as surgeon ; and amid jocosities between the reconciled brothers-in-arms, and with much drinking of wine, the poem ends, not omitting, however, the picture of future felicity for Walter and his bride.

The first of these Anglo-Saxon fragments belongs before the fight in the open. Exhausted by the long struggle with his foes, Walter now for the first time hesitates; he is not quite sure either of himself or of his sword. His own favorite weapon is the spear; and, as he says in the second fragment to Guthhere, he is battle-spent and weary. Probably the Anglo-Saxon poem did not put a night between the two sets of encounters.[1] However that may have been, Hildeguth, who is here no shrinking and quiet maiden, exhorts Walter to play the man. As for his sword, that never failed yet ; as for himself, she knows well what he has done, and willed to do, in the most desperate straits of war. Let him drive Guthhere in disgrace from the field. . . . Not very much of the text between the fragments has been lost. In the second Guthhere is advancing to fight and uttering his boast. He praises his sword

[1] Zupitza is reported as saying in his lectures that "he thought it not impossible that the sequence of the fragments had been turned around." See Josef Fischer, *Zu den Waldere-Fragmenten*, Breslau, 1886.

and gives its proud history. Walter, or Waldere, replies that tired as he is, he is a match for the king; nor has Hagen, as the king hoped, broken down Walter's strength so as to make him an easy victim. His defiant invitation to Guthhere to come and fetch the spoils of war from his person is good Germanic; so perhaps is the pious bow to fate, to God, but it has been set to a feebler tune. The style of these fragments is not so energetic and convincing as the style of *Finnsburg;* but taken all together they show that our literature has lost a fine story not ineffectively told.

The manuscript of the *Waldere* belongs to the library of Copenhagen, where it was found as cover for some unvalued sermons.

A

Hildeguth spake. She heartened[1] him eagerly:
"Sure, work of Wayland[2] will weaken never
with any man who can Mimming wield,
hoary-hued sword. Many heroes by turn
blood-stained and blade-pierced in battle it felled.[3]
Attila's van-leader,[4] valor of thine let not
fail thee to-day or thy doughty-mood fall!

[1] If we translate "heard him gladly," then the conjectural words in italics are wrong. Heinzel thinks this speech is made by some comrade, some man, to Waldere, who "hears him gladly." But the other supposition, that Hildeguth addresses her lover and hero, is vastly preferable.

[2] The sword. In the *Beowulf*, Wayland is credited with the making of the hero's breastplate; and there as here the sword must have a name of the patronymic form.

[3] Literally, "have fallen"; *sc.* by its work.

[4] In the Latin poem, Waltharius just before he fled from Attila had led his master's army against the foe in a successful campaign.

. . . The day is come
when to one or other thy way must lead, —
loss of life, or lasting glory
ever with earth-dwellers, Ælfhere's son!
Nowise can my words bewail, O friend,
that ever I saw thee,[1] when swords were at play,
shamefully shrink from shock of battle
with warrior foe, and flee to the wall
to shield thy body, — though blades enow
hewed on thy harness from hostile throng!
Nay, further ever the fight thou hast urged,
and I feared thy fate, so far thy venture,
lest thou too wildly shouldst war, and seek,
in clash of contest, combat mortal
with another man.[2] Have mind now on honor,
on glory of war, while God is with thee!
Fear not for the brand: the bravest of weapons,
'twas given to help us[3]! On Guthhere, therefore,
beat down his boast; this battle he sought,
and stirred up strife in spite of justice;
the sword he claimed, and the caskets of treasure,[4]
wealth of rings: now, wanting them all
he shall flee from this fight to find his lord,
hasten homeward, or here shall he die
if he . . .

[1] That is, "ever heard it said of thee that thou . . ."

[2] She has often been frightened about his fate, she says, fearing he would go beyond even the bounds of his wonderful resources and so fall victim to some hostile warrior. Now is the time to show that same desperate spirit. . . .

[3] Literally, "as an aid to both of us."

[4] In the Latin poem Guntharius pretends he has a right to Walter's plunder in pay for the tribute the Franks have sent to Attila.

B

". . . a better sword [1]
save only this, which I as well [2]
have kept concealed in the stone-bright case.[3]
I know that Theodric [4] thought to send it
to Widia [5] himself, with wealth of treasure,
of gold with that glaive, and gifts enow
precious: — so Widia was paid his reward
that the kinsman of Nithhad [6] from cruel straits,
son of Wayland, saved his lord,
who journeyed fast from the giants' land."

Waldere spake, warrior famous,
held in his hand the help-in-battle,[7]

[1] Guthhere is making his boast before opening fight. Hagen still holds off. In preceding lines Guthhere probably said that his own sword was better than Waldere's.

[2] As thou?

[3] "Jewelled scabbard" seems a good meaning. "Here is a sword as good as any, though, like thyself, I have not yet unsheathed it," may be the purport of this speech. Then we come into smooth water. The sword was once property of the great hero, etc.

[4] Theodoric the Goth played a main part in Germanic legend as Dietrich of Bern, chief vassal of Attila. His figure is familiar in the last scene of the *Nibelungen*.

[5] Widia is probably the Wudga of *Widsith*, vv. 124 ff., where he is one of the great warriors of Ermanric; here he is transferred to the Theodric legend.

[6] Widia is thought to be the historical Vidigoja; but by this account he was son of Wayland (Wēland, Vølundr) by Baduhild, daughter of Nithhad. In the well-known myth, Nithhad captures Wayland and takes away his magic ring so that he cannot fly (by another more prosaic account, hamstrings him), gives the ring, with others, to his daughter Baduhild, and sets the divine smith to useful work in captivity. The daughter comes to Wayland to have her ring repaired; but Wayland detains her, and begets this son by her. One of Widia's feats in his service with Theodric is to free his lord from the giants.

[7] Kenning for "sword."

weapon of war; his words he uttered:
"Lo, great was thy faith, Burgundians'-friend,[1]
that Hagen's hand would hold me to warfare,
unfit me for fighting! Now fetch, if thou darest,
from so battle-worn[2] man this breastplate gray!
Here it stands on my shoulders, splendid with gold,
Ælfhere's heirloom, amply studded,[3]
no evil armor for atheling's wear
if only with hands he can heart and life
guard from his foes. It fails me never
when cruel unkindred[4] crowd upon me,
beset me with swords, as ye sought me here!
Yet One Only[5] availeth the victory to give,
ready to aid whatever is right!
Whoso hopes for help from the Holy One,
Grace of God, will get it surely,
if his ways have earlier earned him that.
Then haughty heroes may have their reward,
and wield their wealth. . . .

[1] Kenning for "king," as in *Beowulf*.

[2] See introductory remarks above. Waldere has slain all the vassals of Guthhere save Hagen, if we follow the account of Ekkehard.

[3] "Wide-nebbed."

[4] *Unmægas.* — The adjective "cruel" is conjectured.

[5] This is not so incongruous as it looks from the point of view of the preceding boast. The concession to Wyrd, or Fate, probably formed a part of these old speeches of defiance. "Wyrd goes aye as she must," says Beowulf. New theology accented the concession and added the graces of Christian humility.

CHAPTER IV

THE HILDEBRAND LAY

ALTHOUGH not written in English, the Hildebrand Lay, sole fragment of the old epic poetry in German, is so nearly related in matter and manner to parts of the English epic, and derives its theme from sources related so closely to the source of *Waldere*, that a translation of it may well be added to the foregoing pieces. One has thus a body of West-Germanic poetry of the early period, to offset the far greater mass of East-Germanic poetry preserved by happy chance in Scandinavia.

The facts about this lay of *Hildebrand and Hathubrand* are hard to fix in detail; but the general drift is clear. Not far from the year 800, two monks, who may have belonged to the monastery at Fulda, copied the poem, which lacks both beginning and end, on the covers of a theological manuscript. Probably they had the poem before them in writing. If so, this in its turn was written, as Lachmann urges for the copy, from memory; and memory retained only those parts that have come to us. Some roving singer had sung to the High-German writer a song which was mainly in Low-German dialect; and what this writer could remember of it he had set down in a curious mixture of linguistic forms, but not in such utter confusion as to forbid the recognition of the original piece as substantially of Saxon origin.

The main theme is very old and has always been popu-

lar; for proof, one needs but to mention such a distant and modern treatment of it as the *Sohrab and Rustum* of Matthew Arnold. Scholars have found it in widely spread and varying forms; and a German ballad, many centuries later, has actually given to the grim scene a happy ending. In its present shape the story has become part of the Theodoric legend, and as such must be credited to the romantic and highly poetical Goths; would that some kindly fate had preserved the rich and sonorous words of their version! The *Nibelungen*, as every one knows, places old Hildebrand as Dietrich's right-hand man, who, with his lord, has been long among the Huns, in that banishment of which Deor speaks in the Anglo-Saxon lyric, — only in the Hildebrand Lay one is told that Odoacer is cause of the flight. Kögel points out the curious perversity of legend when it deals with historical facts: it was Odoacer whom Theodoric really shut up in Ravenna and put to death. That Attila and Theodoric became contemporary in this cycle of legends, and are treated as overlord and chief vassal, is another license of the legendary muse. But the poem is the thing. Undoubtedly it is much closer than such epic verse as the *Beowulf*, and even the *Waldere* fragments, to the old songs which minstrels had come to sing and which warriors still made about their own deeds or the deeds of their friends. The nervous directness is here which one was tempted to find characteristic of *Finnsburg*. Full of blunders as the manuscript is, with patches of something very like prose when the scribe failed to remember his original, — one should think of a schoolboy writing out from memory *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, — the whole effect is that of contact with strong and resonant verse.

The original, as was hinted above, must have had a tragic ending; the theme demands it, and not only a scrap of this same tale in Old Norse, but analogy of other cases, where similar matter is handled, sustains the demand. The father unwillingly kills his son. Such things must have actually happened now and again in the days of the *comitatus*, and ten Brink surmises such a case in the *Finnsburg* with Garulf and Guthlaf; but the killing of near kin remained the capital crime for a German. The frequency of it means, for the Sibyl of the *Voluspa* poem, the approaching end of the world. Here, then, was tragedy of the kind which thrilled a Greek audience at the fearful dilemma of Orestes. Loyalty to one's lord was a Germanic virtue which grew stronger with the necessities of constant warfare, until it came to be supreme, and thus overshadowed the obligations of actual kindred. Hildebrand is a victim of the clash of these two duties, — and not for once only. Thirty years before this crowning tragedy, he was forced to choose between his lord, a banished man, and his wife and child. Now the child faces him in arms.

HILDEBRAND AND HATHUBRAND

. . . I heard it said[1] . .
that as foemen in fight sole faced each other
Hildebrand and Hathubrand, two hosts between.[1]
There son and father their fighting-gear tested,

[1] Related, told in song and lay. "So the books tell us," says the medieval writer. Even in Scottish ballads of the border a statement is backed by the assertion that "the chronicle will not lie." The poet of the *Heliand* uses the "heard" formula, though the gospels are authority for his narrative.

[2] "Between two armies." They meet, like two Homeric heroes, between the opposing lines, exchange speeches, and come to fight.

made ready their battle-weeds, belted the sword
o'er their ring-mail, the heroes, who rode to the fray.
Hildebrand spake, Herebrand's son, —
. . . he was riper in years,
the older man: to ask he commenced,
though few his words, who his [1] father was
of human folk [2] . . .
. . . "or of what race thou mayst be,
if thou namest one only, the others I know.
All kindred I ken in this kingdom, O youth!"
Hathubrand spake, Hildebrand's son: —
"Trusty [3] people have told to me,
who, old and wise, knew ancient ways,
my father was Hildebrand: Hathubrand I!
Long ago went he eastward; from Otacher's [4] hate
with Theotrich [5] fled he, and thanes in plenty.
In his land he left forlorn behind him
bride in bower and boy ungrown,
reft of inheritance: rode he yet eastward!
Theotrich later, in thronging perils,
of my father had need: 'twas so friendless a man! [6]

[1] Hathubrand's. Hildebrand's wide knowledge of the tribes of men is characteristic of his age, his standing, and his experience. So Hrothgar shows he is familiar with "the best people" and their kin, the instant he hears Beowulf's name. *B.*, 372.

[2] Editors and critics assume that something has been lost at this point. But it has been remarked that such abrupt transitions are common in Germanic verse. Still, even so there is loss of rime. Probably the copyists forgot just how the verse ran and set it down as King Alfred says he now and then translated Latin, — "sense for sense." Only the poetry is lost here.

[3] Möller's emendation to save the rime. [4] Odoacer.

[5] Dietrich usually in German; Theodric in Anglo-Saxon.

[6] One who is banished, without kin and clan to support him. Some translate this as meaning Theotrich: "banished as he was, he had good

Boundlessly angry at Otacher was he,
the trustiest thane in Theotrich's service,
ever front in the folk-rank, too fain for battle,
famous was he among fighting-men bold!
I believe not he lives." . . .
Hildebrand *spake*, *Herebrand's son:* [1] —
" But High-God knows, in heaven above,
that thou never yet with such near-kin man,
hero brave, hast held thy parley!"

He unwound from his arm the winding rings,
of kaiser-gold wrought, that the king had given him,
Lord of the Huns: " In love now I give it thee."
Hathubrand spake, Hildebrand's son: —
" With the spear should a man receive his gifts,
point against point . . .
Thou art over-crafty, thou agéd Hun, —
enthrallst me with speech to o'erthrow me with spear.
Old as thou'st grown, bear'st only guile!
Seafaring folk [2] have said to me,
come west over Wendelsea, — War hath seized him.
Dead is Hildebrand, Herebrand's son!"

need," etc. The " he " of the next line, of course, is Hildebrand, who is enraged because Otacher forces him to leave wife and child.

[1] The italicized words are Möller's conjectural emendation; they make only slight changes, and restore the verse. The original runs: "'The mighty God is my witness,' quoth Hildebrand, 'from heaven above, that in spite of this [*i.e.* 'that thou hast said.' Probably the preceding gap is a large one and much talk has passed between the warriors] thou hast never yet parleyed [Scherer translates "fought"] with a man so near of kin.'" The *quoth Hildebrand* is a singer's aside, such as is often thrust into the text of ballads, and lies outside of the metrical scheme.

[2] Compare *Beowulf*, vv. 377, 411. *Wentilseo* is the Anglo-Saxon *Wendelsæ*, the Mediterranean. " War [probably personified] hath seized him " is a familiar phrase in *Beowulf*.

Hildebrand spake, Herebrand's son [1] . . .
"Well can I see by thy war-gear now,[2]
the ruler thou hast at home is rich,
nor under this king wast thou cast into exile.
. . . Wellaway, God all-wielding, fate's woe is upon us!
I was summers and winters full sixty a-wandering,
and still was I chosen with chief of the troops;
yet at no burg [3] was death ever dealt me by man.
Now my own sweet son with sword must hew me,
fell me with falchion, or fall at my hands!
— Yet [4] 'tis easily done, if thou doughty be,[5]
from so old a man his arms to take,
to seize the spoil, if such strength be thine.[6]

[1] Editors incline to think that Hildebrand's subsequent speech is lost and that the following words of the text belong to Hathubrand, whose suspicion is increased as he looks on his father's sumptuous armor. A man must have a powerful lord to give him such gear, — run his thoughts, — not a homeless exile. But it is also natural for the old man to look on the young warrior's rich armor and draw similar conclusions.

[2] The original verse is rimeless and corrupt.

[3] At the taking of no fortified place during my time of exile, in no battle, however desperate, has death found me.

[4] A parallel to this sudden transition from the tender and pathetic to sarcasm and defiance may be found in the tragic popular ballad of *Bewick and Graham*. Here the dilemma is that a son must either disobey and actually fight his own father or fight his dearest friend, his "sworn-brother." He chooses the latter. The friend, of course, cannot believe the announcement of this impending fight, and reminds the unwilling challenger of long and firm brotherhood between the two. The challenger half explains the situation, and is dropping into pathos; but knowing its perils, suddenly changes the note: —

> "If thou be a man, as I think thou art,
> Come over that ditch and fight with me." . . .

[5] See *Beowulf* for the identical phrase, a commonplace, v. 573.

[6] That is, "if thou hast the right [of the victor] to it."

Most infamous were he [1] of East-Goth folk
who should keep thee from combat so keenly desired,
from fight with foe! Let the fated one [2] try
whether now his trappings be taken from him,
or both of these breast-plates he boast as his own."

Charging with ash-spears,[3] clashed they first,
with sharpest shafts the shields that clove.
Then strode to the struggle those sturdy-warriors,[4]
hewed in hate on the white-faced shields,
until both of the lindens [5] little grew,
all worn with weapons. . . .

[1] Here the text has "quoth Hildebrand."

[2] The warrior whose fate it is now to fight. Said of both of them.

[3] They ride furiously at each other with levelled lances, each trying to pass or pierce the shield of his opponent. Then they dismount and stride to the fight with swords.

[4] The compound word so translated is not found elsewhere, but it is a kenning for the warriors.

[5] Shields, as often in the English epic.

CHAPTER V

THE SINGER AND HIS LAY

IF the *Beowulf* and the *Waldere* were epic poems composed by that more deliberate process in vogue in the *scriptorium*, there are lays like the *Hildebrand* and *Finnsburg*, material of the epics, which seem to demand the living voice, the banquet in hall, the excited band of warriors who listen and shout applause to the singer. A minstrel of this type had in memory a store of favorite lays, old and new. He had, too, the technique of his art, and could on occasion improvise upon new material, using of course the traditional and conventional phrases which made a good half of all his songs. He was a striking figure. In two happy rescues from the wreckage of our old poetry, he not only tells the story of his life, but indicates the range of the material at his command.

I

DEOR THE SINGER

On the face of it, this distinctly charming lyric is a kind of "Ode to Himself" in Ben Jonson's vein. The aging minstrel has ceased to please the public, particularly the king; his place as court poet, even his home and lands, are given to a successful rival. Well, he has sung in his day of many a man and woman of the heroic time who knew fortune's frown at its blackest, and yet came

into sunshine at last. The *exempla* shall give him hope; and hope is the overword of his breezy refrain. It is a manly piece of verse. The poet does not rail on lady fortune herself, does not whine or snivel over the king's inconstancy, and does not call the public hard names, — "dull ass" is Jonson's way, — with insistence on his own superiority. Granting, what is true, that "Widsith" is a wholly ideal figure, composite, a type, and granting, what is probable, that Deor must pass as a definite man, it is highly gratifying that the first poet whom we can name as an individual in the long English list gives such an amiable account of himself.

Careful reading of the lyric, however, takes away something of the immediate impression made by its plan and its seeming purpose. Deor, to be sure, stands before us a definite and quite real man, but he is not an Englishman; he belongs on the continent, and his people, the "sons of Heoden," are shadowy folk. He is even accused of getting into English by translation out of the Norse. Any actual personal poem that such a singer could have made about his own fortunes had a long and thorny way to travel before it came to its present estate as the oldest lyric in our tongue. From our point of view, it is the story of the typical court-singer, just as *Widsith* is a story of the typical wandering singer. Widsith, too, talks in the first person, tells what gifts he got, where he wandered, and how excellent was his art. "I and Scilling were as good poets as you could find, — and the best judges of poetry applauded us to the echo," is his complacent account of the matter. The difference really lies in the fact that Widsith, for all his first personal confidences, makes no impression as an individual on any count;

he comes in sections; while Deor is artistically an individual, if not a definite man who tells us as matter of the witness-box his own emotion and thought. It is true that all the material of Deor's song is continental; but Anglo-Saxon poets were quite capable of making such a compact and convincing "dramatic lyric" out of the old stuff. They were accustomed to "ego" verses: one thinks of the *Riddles*, and, still better, of *The Dream of the Rood*. *The Wanderer* is another case, not unlike this of *Deor*, though of much later origin; both poems are artistically sincere and sympathetic. *Deor*, old as it is, has the modern lyric note of annexing wide human interests and a sweep of history in order to illustrate the singer's proper fate; and this conception on the part of an English poet would blend admirably with the tradition of some minstrel in the ancestral home, who took courage from his own stock of lays and fronted his evil hour with a smile. That, however, is an impression. There are facts which must be considered; and these facts seem at first to allow another inference.

The form of *Deor's Song* is peculiar. It has a refrain-line which marks off the verses into sections or paragraphs, so that one is tempted to call it a poem in stanzas. Traces of the same structure are noted in the *Rune-Lay*, and naturally also in the *Psalms;* but the mere recurrence of a refrain does not suffice to form the regular stanza. In part of the *Gnomic Verses*, or *Maxims*, of the Exeter manuscript,[1] however, and in what used to be called the first of the *Riddles*, there is an attempt to make those regular stanzas which are so familiar in Old Norse; and the result must be noted here, in order to reach a right judgment about

[1] See note to *Beowulf*, v. 1250.

the structure of the old singer's lay. The first of the *Riddles* was once interpreted as giving the name of the poet Cynewulf. Recently it has been taken out of the category of riddles and referred to an incident in the famous Saga of the Volsungs, a Norse tale, whose legend was familiar in far older form to the poet of the *Beowulf*. As *Signy's Lament*, Professor Schofield translates it and explains its meaning. Signy is twin sister to Sigmund; she is married against her will to Siggeir, who slays her father and has all her brothers exposed and killed save Sigmund, who is helped by Signy to escape to the forest, where he lives as an outlaw. An outlaw was often called "wolf." The Wolf of the poem, therefore, is Sigmund. Signy is fain to revenge her slaughtered kinsfolk; her own sons by King Siggeir are nought; and she resolves to have by her own brother a son who shall show the Volsung mettle. Revolting as the deed seems to her, she must do it for the sake of revenge. Disguised, she goes to Sigmund in the forest, is entertained as a wanderer; returns to her palace; and in due time bears a son, Sinfiotli, the Fitela of the verses in the *Beowulf*,[1] whom she rears for a while and then takes to her brother. Ignorant of his true relation, Sigmund trains up the boy as his nephew, and together they destroy Siggeir, with whom Signy also perishes, as a true Germanic wife, though she is glad thus to avenge her father. Professor Schofield places this *Lament* at the time when Signy commits the boy to her brother's care.

Such is the probable matter. It is the manner, the verse-form, which gives this poem such significance for the study of *Deor*. Its rimes are here and there inaccurate; the rhythm is close in some parts to the kind common

[1] See B., 859 ff.

in Scandinavian but practically unknown in Anglo-Saxon; and therefore Professor Lawrence, who was first to study this phase of it, assumed it to be a translation out of the Norse. As it follows *Deor* in the Exeter manuscript, and *Deor* also has refrain and what have been taken for stanzas, the two poems are bracketed for similar origins.

Is *Deor*, then, a translation, and is his song to be ranged as an early specimen of those innumerable effusions, studied or improvised, of the Scandinavian bard, which are paraphrased in Saxo's Latin and recorded now in the prose of the Sagas and now in the actual verse? Or is it an original English poem based on traditions of the old minstrel life in Germania, — a document for the Germanic singer in days of the common legendary store in which all Ingævonic peoples about North Sea and Baltic had their part? Here is *Signy's Lament* for comparison, — if a Lament it be, and the supposed making of that tragic person.

I

My people suppose they are pleasured with gifts[1] . . .

. . . . . .

They will surely oppress him if peril comes o'er him.
Unlike are our lots.

II

Wolf's on an isle[2] and I on another;
firm is the island, by fen surrounded.
Unmerciful are they, the men on the isle;
They will surely oppress him if peril comes o'er him.
Unlike are our lots.

[1] The stanza is obscure and much discussed. Lines are thought to be lost which would make up the quatrain.

[2] In the forest, as an outlaw.

III

On my Wolf I waited with wide-faring hopes.
When rainy the weather and rueful I sat there,
then the battle-brave man embraced me beside him.
Delight had I of it; no less had I sorrow.[1]

IV

Wolf, O my Wolf, my waiting and hope of thee,
'twas they made me sick, and thy seldom-coming,
my heavy-weighed heart, and not hunger for food!

V

Hear'st thou, O watchful![2] Swift whelp of us both[3]
borne by Wolf to the wood!
Full lightly is parted what never was paired, —
the song we two sang![4]

Now as compared with *Deor*, translated below, this *Lament* shows signs of the Norse stanzaic structure which are not found in the companion piece. Deor's so-called stanzas are due simply to a recurring and consistently applicable refrain line, such as, for modern instance, one finds in Tennyson's *Tears, Idle Tears*. Parallelism, obvious in *Deor* at the start and so characteristic of all Anglo-Saxon verse, is not found in the *Lament*. *Deor* is

[1] Concentration of the tragic moment. Signy loathed her unnatural mission; she joyed in the anticipated vengeance thus made possible.

[2] By Schofield's interpretation. She now addresses her husband, "the vigilant"; perhaps here in mocking use of the epithet?

[3] Herself and Sigmund. She has given the boy to her brother. — Or is "of us both" a reference, like "vigilant," to Siggeir's belief that he is father to Sinfiotli?

[4] Emended to "the way we two walked." The short even verses and long odd verses, as in Norse, make a plain stanza here, just as in certain gnomic verses one gets a stanza by arrangement. In the first and second stanzas, as assumed, of this poem, a refrain, and also repetition of a line, mark off the bounds.

surely not a translation of the same sort as the *Lament;* it can hardly pass as a translation at all. Its refrain line is originative, is the core and suggestion of the poem. Indeed, this refrain looks as if it might serve, and had served, in other cases. Any number of *exempla* could be fitted to it and it could be shifted to another singer's account. Many another poem, by such a refrain line, could draw lessons from a legendary past, of which the Englishman was once as fond as he was of maxim and moral. Moreover, the autobiographical part of *Deor* is too old in its allusions for a translation out of the Norse ; and it is particularly this singer's voice from the Germanic past which interests the student of songcraft in days before the epic. For this purpose, and in this sense, *Deor* surely seems to be an original English poem and a document, precious beyond words, of Germanic minstrelsy. Its value is not destroyed by the juxtaposition of *Signy's Lament.*

Deor consoles himself by recounting the sufferings and trials of sundry characters in Germanic tradition. He begins with Wayland, smith divine, a favorite in epic and other old verse. Beowulf's breastplate is " Wayland's work " ; in the *Waldere*, Mimming is best of swords and also " work of Wayland." Gest and romance continue to speak of him into the fifteenth century ; and King Alfred had called him greatest of goldsmiths. Localities were named after him. The famous Franks Casket,[1] which Professor Napier assigns to Northumbria for place and the beginning of the eighth century for time, represents Way-

[1] See Napier in *An English Miscellany* (Furnivall Volume), pp. 362 ff., with reproduction of the figures.

land "holding in a pair of tongs the head of one of Nithhad's sons over an anvil," — making a drinking-cup of the skull. In front of Wayland is Beaduhild, King Nithhad's daughter, who went to the captive smith to have her ring mended. Wayland's brother Egil is shooting birds; with wings made of their feathers, Wayland is to escape. Now this scene, which answers to the story of Wayland in a Norse saga, is also indicated by Deor's allusions. Wayland is taken into bondage by the crafty King Nithhad, fettered (by some accounts, hamstrung), and robbed of the ring which gave him power to fly. But Beaduhild, daughter of his captor, and the sons as well, come to him; he mends the rings for the daughter and so recovers his own ring, and his old power — or, by more prosaic accounts, constructs wonderful pinions that enable him to escape. First, however, he kills the king's sons, and puts the daughter to shame. Here are two "cases" for the bard, — first Wayland, and then Beaduhild herself. The next case is extremely difficult; but Hild, if the name shall stand, was unhappy, and so were the exiles, whether Goths or whatever else ingenuity can suggest.[1] Theodric is Theodoric the Goth, "Dietrich of Bern"; for traditions of Germanic verse knew that he was banished to the court of Attila for the thirty winters named by Deor's song. But the allusion here is too vague for precise inference, and the text is evidently marred. Eormanric, again, is the typical tyrant, cruel and remorseless king, of the same traditions; led astray by evil counsel, he puts his only

[1] Grein's explanation still seems the best. Hild is really the Odila of the story told in a Norse saga, and Eormanric was the author of her disgrace; "heroes of Geat" would be Gothic subjects who suffered in the consequent turmoil. Others read "Mæthhilde" as the woman's name, and in the next verse "the love of Geats."

son to death, has his wife torn to pieces, and ruins the happiness of many individuals and, at last, of his realm. From these luckless folk Deor turns to the picture of the Sorrowful Person, and for the first time theology peers over the shoulder of our cheerful bard. Then he tells of himself, his loss, his bad outlook; with a last and personal change rung on his brave refrain, and waking a fervent desire in the reader that the second clause of it "came true," this sane and sound old singer ends his song.

I

Wayland learned bitterly banishment's ways,
earl right resolute; ills enduréd;
had for comrades Care and Longing,[1]
winter-cold wanderings; woe oft suffered
when Nithhad forged the fetters on him,[2]
bending bonds on a better man.
That he surmounted: so this may I!

II

Beaduhild mourned her brother's death
less sore in soul than herself dismayed
when her plight was plainly placed before her, —
birth of a bairn. No brave resolve
might she ever make, what the end should be.
That she surmounted: so this may I!

[1] Perhaps an allusion to one of the two Wayland stories, where his wife, once swan-maid, resuming her swan-raiment, leaves him, and he pines vainly for sight of her.

[2] A slight change in the text would square the account with that version of the story which has Wayland hamstrung: —

> When Nithhad put such need upon him,
> laming wound on a lordlier man.

III

We have heard from many of Hild's disgrace,
how heroes of Geat were homeless made
till sorrow stole their sleep away.
That they surmounted: so this may I![1]

IV

Theodric waited[2] for thirty winters
in Merings' burg: to many 'twas known.
That he surmounted: so this may I!

V

We have often heard of Eormanric,
his wolfish mind; wide was his rule
o'er realm of Goths: a grim king he!
Sat many a subject sorrow-bound,
waiting but woe, and wished full sore
that the time of the king might come to end.
That they surmounted: so this may I!

VI

— Sitteth one[3] sorrowful, severed from joys;
all's dark in his soul; he deems for him
endless ever the anguish-time!
Yet let him think that through this world

[1] Some editors and translators omit this refrain, and make one "case" of the two treated in III and IV; also, as noted above, reading "Mæthhilde" and "the love-longing of Geat had no bounds."

[2] Lived there, that is, at some castle of the Huns, as Attila's vassal. See notes to the *Hildebrand* lay.

[3] That is, any person who has lost his situation and has fallen on evil times. If the strict dramatic-lyric scheme be assumed, this could pass as interpolation. The writer of these lines could hardly have taken Deor's own tonic.

the wise God all awards with difference,
on many an earl great honor lays,
wealth at will, but woe on others.
— To say of myself the story now,
I was singer[1] erewhile to sons-of-Heoden,
dear to my master, Deor my name.
Long were the winters my lord was kind;
I was happy with clansmen ; till Heorrenda[2] now
by grace of his lays[3] has gained the land
which the haven-of-heroes[4] erewhile gave me.
That he[5] *surmounted : so this may I!*

II

WIDSITH

THIS word, beyond reasonable doubt, means "far-wanderer" ; the poem surely describes the life and defines the vocation of a typical roving singer of the older times. How its parts were put together, what credit goes to its historical and biographical statements, how one is to reconstruct the wanderer's itinerary, are questions still under lively debate ;[6] they are not to be discussed now

[1] In the original, *Scop.* He was court-singer to the king of the Heodenings. See *Widsith*, v. 21.

[2] Horant is the sweet singer in *Gudrun* (a late offshoot of the Hild story) whose song makes all the birds cease their own lays and listen to him.

[3] Literally but awkwardly —

lay-craft's man, the land has received. . . .

[4] The king. Frequent kenning in the *Beowulf.*

[5] Who ? Is the refrain here a kind of echo ? Is this Deor who surmounted his troubles, as also may the hearer or reader who repeats the poem ? Was the whole a general poem of consolation ?

[6] Well discussed by Dr. W. W. Lawrence in *Modern Philology* for October, 1906, who has shed light on several dark places in the poem. The short introduction, and the equally short epilogue, were almost surely written in England.

beyond their quite incidental bearing upon the personality of the *scop* himself.

Widsith is introduced by the usual formula as about to speak and as a man worth hearing. He comes of good stock ; is champion rover in his profession ; and once went on an important mission with persons of the very highest rank. But the first outcome of his "word-hoard" is disappointing. For some forty lines he is very dull ; the speech does not belong to him, one is fain to think, but is rather a poetical list of kings and peoples, like those made for children in modern times, easy to remember by means of the rime-scheme into which the names must fit. Saxo uses such a list of alliterating names in telling of those who fought at Bravalla ; but he fills out the original Norse.[1] With these English *versus memoriales* also is mingled other stuff. There is a moral reflection, at which the modern hearer of sermons and lectures would do well not to scoff ; and there are two passages which go into legendary details, — one about Offa and one about Hrothgar and Hrothwulf. With the fiftieth line, a good sounding verse, by the way, the Far-Wanderer drops his impersonal and hearsay information, and for the rest of the poem speaks of things he has seen for himself. It is a miscellaneous account, not only in matter, but in style, spirit, and effect. Apart from the impossible Israelites and Assyrians of his itinerary, the singer betrays either the plurality of his origins or his incapacity to tell a good, cheerful, likely lie such as one expects from a forerunner of Mandeville ; a travelled man, moreover, he now stammers along as the most helpless of artists, and now breaks

[1] See Holder's Ed., p. 257, beginning of Bk. VIII ; and Vigfusson and Powell, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 353 ff.

out into vivid and moving verse. His account of his visit to Eormanric is in parts admirably done. At last he is silent; the word-hoard is locked again; and in a little epilogue the pen of some sympathetic scribe epitomizes a minstrel's life, and chants that most English of all English refrains, the *memento mori*.

So much for Widsith as this oldest of the rescued early poems in English sets him forth. His supposed words are obviously put together in different places and times. Very likely the tale of his actual wanderings, continuous and dealing with definite occasions, may be the original part of the poem, as Dr. Lawrence suggests; but even this modest statement cannot be positively affirmed. No one singer ever saw or did what Widsith professes to have seen and done; and some of the statements can have no basis of fact in the experience of anybody. Widsith's story is fiction, so one must fairly admit; but Widsith himself is true. He is rescued from the past, with a queer patchwork story which purports to be of his making, and which deals exclusively — as his brother Deor's tale also dealt — with continental places, persons, and times. Like another singer of far later date, the German Traugemund,[1] he comes with a "true tale" of many strange things which he has seen in his wanderings. The man who copied him into the Exeter Book must have been a lover of the past; the rescue of this old singer with his queer itinerary, his scraps of epic and wastes of history and biography outworn, might well have been precious in the eyes of an antiquarian. One suspects, moreover, that this convenient traveller had fathered many a group of verses, more or less connected in general subject, which imparted "things

[1] Uhland, *Volkslieder*, I, 1.

everybody ought to know." *Widsith says so* was good verification for statements of this sort, just as Alfred or Hending or whoever else was sound authority for a proverb. There must have been many lays in which a singer spoke of his far journeys, but did not mention his own name. Folk, as Möller points out, would call him just what he said he was, — a far-wanderer. The name was generic. In a different sense, the name of Robinson became generic for the actual stories told in the first-person by men who followed Defoe's enticing trail; there were hundreds of "Robinsons" in the eighteenth century.

This pedantic Widsith may be to some extent a creature of the English pen; but a real roving singer has been rescued from continental tradition in his name. The pomp of heroic lays still echoes in his faltering speech. He has the court accent, the high manner; he wears none but a king's livery, and takes only royal gifts. One wishes profoundly he had told more about himself, and had held longer the note of battle he strikes so well; but one is grateful to have him on any terms.

WIDSITH

"THE FAR-WANDERER"

Widsith spake, his word-hoard unlocked,
who farthest had fared among folk of earth
through tribes of men, oft taking in hall
rich meed of gold.[1] Of the Myrging line
his ancestors woke.[2] With Ealhhild fair,
weaver-of-concord, went he first,[3]

[1] For his minstrelsy.

[2] Were born, — kenning, or metaphor, considerably faded.

[3] For the first time. If any consistency is to be found in this poem, we must think of Ealhhild (see also v. 97) as a princess of the Myrgings

seeking the home of the Hrethan king, —
from the east, from Anglia, — Eormanric fierce,
marrer-of-covenants.[1] — Much he sang.
"Many men have I heard of who held dominion.
Let every leader live aright,
earl after earl in honor rule,
who thinks to thrive and his throne maintain!
Of these[2] was Hwala a while the best,

(a tribe living near the Elbe) who goes to the Gothic court to be wife ("weaver-of-concord" is the usual kenning) to Eormanric. Widsith goes with her. If she is called daughter to Audoin (therefore sister to Alboin), and thus is made out a hundred and fifty years or so younger than her husband, and if the conqueror of Italy is put back in the old home of the Langobards, these inconsistencies are only a part of the legendary process. To the English writer of this short prologue, the figures of his continental legends, even when historical, had no chronology. All belonged together; and the various nations are pictured in their original territories. Even the favorites of the English themselves never leave the old home.

[1] Foil to "weaver-of-concord." Eormanric, king of "Hreth-Goths," or Goths, is the typical tyrant in Germanic legend, — witness *Deor's Song*, — and the epithets are bestowed on him as part of his proper name. That he had not won them at the time of this supposed marriage, but was a generous prince, we gather from vv. 88 ff., where the singer warms at the remembrance of a fine gratuity. Epithets, moreover, must not be taken too literally. The *Beowulf* poet speaks of the "Victor"-Scyldings when telling of their defeat. — "From the east" (long misunderstood) means that the home of Ealhhild and Widsith was in the "east" for the writer of this prologue in England; Anglia being the "old home" on the Cimbrian peninsula and by the lower Elbe. Not far from this old home, for the writer and for the legends that he knew, were still grouped Goths and Vandals to the eastward, by the Baltic, and nearer yet, the Langobards.

[2] This list, which in vv. 18 ff. shows (in the alternating use, for example, of the word "ruled") plain traces of a strophic or stanzaic arrangement, is of immense ethnological interest. It ends with names that give a glimpse of legend itself, and it shows an effort at systematic grouping. — The moral, too, with which it opens, is in the vein so often found in old epic; gnomic verse is very ancient, and there is no need to put these edifying lines upon an "interpolator."

and Alexander, of all, the greatest
in the race of men, and most he throve
of any on earth that ever I heard.
Attila ruled Huns, and Eormanric Goths,
Becca the Banings,[1] Burgundy Gifeca.
Cæsar ruled Greeks and Cælic Finns,[2]
Hagena Holmrygas, Heoden the Glommas.[3]
Witta ruled Sueves, and Wada[4] the Hælsings,
Meaca the Myrgings, Mearchealf the Hundings.
Theodric[5] ruled Franks, and Thyle the Rondings,
Breoca the Brondings, Billing the Wernas.
Oswine ruled Eowas, Ytas[6] Gefwulf,
Fin[7] the Folcwalding Frisian clans.
Sigehere longest the Sea-Danes ruled,

[1] The word means "murderers." Müllenhoff counts with these epithet-names others in the two lists like (v. 59) Wicings, that is, "vikings" or "men who camp"; (v. 24) Rondings, or "shieldsmen"; (v. 63) Sword-weras, "swordsmen" or "men of an oath."

[2] These would be the extremes, south and north, for the Germanic singer.

[3] Baltic folk. Hagena (see *Waldere*, B, 15) and Heoden belong to the old Hild Myth.

[4] Wada, Wade, along with Wayland, survived the conquest and was still a favorite in Chaucer's time. "Tales of Wade" were proverbial. In *Troilus and Criseide*, III, 614:

He songe, she playde, he tolde a tale of Wade.

As a seafaring person he had his "boat," to which Chaucer refers in the *Merchant's Tale*, C. T., E. 1424. Binz adds a reference in *Sir Bevis* which makes Wade fight a "fire-drake," like Beowulf, and one from Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, — "as wight as ever was Wade . . ." — comparison of power and prowess.

[5] Not the Goth, of course, but a king of the Franks.

[6] H. Möller, *Altenglisches Volksepos*, p. 88, declares these Ytas to be the people who invaded and settled Kent, — not the Danish Jutes, but a Frisian tribe.

[7] For this verse, with 29 and 31, see the fragment of *Finnsburg*, translated above, and the episode, in *Beowulf*, vv. 1068 ff.

Hnæf the Hocings, Helm [1] the Wulfings,
Wald the Woings, Wod Thuringians,
Sæferth the Sycgan, the Swedes Ongentheow,[2]
Sceafthere Ymbras, Sceafa Longbards,
Hun the Hætweras, Holen the Wrosnas.
Hringwald was hight the Herefars' king.
Offa [3] ruled Angles; Alewih Danes, —
of all mankind in mood the bravest,
yet never with Offa his earlship availed:
for Offa won, of all men first,
when still a boy the broadest empire:
none of his age showed earlship more
in stress of battle with single brand:
against the Myrgings marked he bounds
by Fifeldor: [4] thenceforth 'twas held
by Sueve and Angle as Offa won it.
Hrothwulf and Hrothgar [5] held the longest

[1] *Beowulf*, v. 620, Hrothgar's queen is said to belong to the family of Helmings.

[2] *Ibid.*, vv. 2472 ff., 2910 ff., the story is told of struggles between Swede and Geat in which this king plays a part.

[3] Legendary king of the continental Angles. Offa, king of Mercia, traced his blood through this elder namesake to Woden. — See, too, *Beowulf*, vv. 1949, 1957.

[4] The river Eider.

[5] See *Beowulf*, vv. 1017, 1181 f. Hrothwulf is nephew to King Hrothgar, and evidently if the old king should die would be natural guardian to his children. The queen (1181) expresses her confidence that Hrothwulf in that event would take no advantage of his position. It would seem that she feared otherwise and her fears were well founded; but this present passage shows that when the uncle lived he and his nephew worked in concord; and the victory mentioned is when Ingeld, Hrothgar's son-in-law, broke his oaths (*B.*, 84) and in revenge for old wrongs (*B.*, 2024 ff., tells the story and foretells the trouble) invaded the Danish kingdom. At Herorot (Hrothgar's great hall) he is badly defeated. — See also the saga of Hrolf-Kraki.

concord of kin as cousins[1] together,
after they routed the race of Wicings,
laid prone the pride of the power of Ingeld,
hewed down at Heorot the Heathobard line.

So I fared through many a foreign realm[2]
this wide earth o'er, as weal or ill
came to my ken; of my kin bereft,
far from my folk, I followed onward.
Wherefore I can sing and say my tales,
to men in the mead-hall make my lay,
how high-born heroes heaped me gifts.
I was with Huns and with Hrethan Goths,[3]
with Swedes and with Geats[4] and with Southern Danes,
with Wenlas[5] and with Wærnas and with the Wicings,
with Gefthas and with Winedas and with Geflegas,
with Angles and with Sueves and with Ænenas,
with Saxons and with Scygan and with the Swordmen,
with Hronas and with Deanas and with Heatho-Reamas.[6]

[1] In the old sense of "uncle-and-nephew," which is the literal meaning of the text. In the ballad of Arthur and Gawain, uncle and nephew, the former says to the latter: "thou art my coz," — sister's son.

[2] Rhys, *Celtic Heathendom*, p. 248, notes that the Celtic bards also pretended to have been present at the scenes they describe.

[3] Huns and Goths, as before with Attila and Eormanric, belong together. See *Waldere* and *Hildebrand*.

[4] See the introduction to the *Beowulf*.

[5] Wulfgar in *Beowulf*, v. 348, is "prince of the Wendlas," perhaps a tribe of Danes well to the north. Müllenhoff identifies them with the Vandals, who once lived by the Baltic, as did the Wenedas (Wends). The old grouping, before that great movement of the tribes which made the heroic age, is here regarded as unbroken.

[6] Tribe in southern Norway. See *Beowulf*, vv. 519 f. In translating vv. 59–63 a superfluous "I was" is omitted. The verses are longer than others, except 68 f., 76, and 79–84.

With Thyrings[1] was I, and Throwends too;
and with the Burgundians got I a ring,
when Guthhere[2] gave me the glittering treasure
in pay for my song: no puny king!
With Franks and Frisians and Frumtings was I,
with Rugas and Glommas and Rumwalas.[3]
Likewise with Ælfwine[4] in Italy was I:
of all mankind I ken he had
the fairest hand his fame to heighten,
heart most ungrudging in gift of rings,
of shining circlets, son of Eadwine.
With Saracens was I, and Serings too,
with Greeks and with Finns, and with Cæsar[5] was I,
he that ruled o'er the revellers' cities,[6]
wielded the wealth of the Walas'[7] realm.
With Scots and Picts, and Scrid-Finns[8] was I,
with Lith-Wicings, Leonas, and Longobards,
with Heathmen and Hæreths and Hunding folk.

[1] Thuringians.

[2] See the *Waldere*. He is the *Nibelungen* Gunther, with a difference.

[3] That is, "Rome-Welsh," foreigners of Rome. A curious bit of popular etymology turned Romulus into Anglo-Saxon Romwalus.

[4] This is the famous Alboin, son of Audoin (=Eadwine in Anglo-Saxon), the Langobard or Lombard king who invaded Italy in 568 A.D. His people had already shifted their territory from the neighborhood of the Elbe to the Danube. Paul the Deacon records that Alboin's generosity and fame were known by all of Germanic tongue "and sung in their songs."

[5] The rimes are disordered; but *Creacum* answers to *Casere* with the *k* sound.

[6] Literally, "wine-burg," place of banquets.

[7] As above, "foreigners"; the Italians are still called "Welsh" by German folk.

[8] Probably the "Snow-Shoe Finns," such as King Alfred heard about from the sea-captain. The Finns in vv. 20, 77, Müllenhoff places in the northeast of Europe.

With Israelites was I and with the Ex-Syrings,[1]
with Ebrews and Indians, in Egypt too.
With Medes and Persians and Myrging folk,
and with Mofdingas too, and the Myrgings beyond,
and with Amothings, and with East-Thyrings,
with Eolas, Istas, and Idumeans.[2]
And[3] I was with Eormanric all that while
the king of the Goths was gracious to me.
A ring he gave me, ruler of strongholds,
on which six-hundred of solid gold
was scored for the treasure by shilling-count;[4]
I made then Eadgils owner of this,
my helmet-lord,[5] when home I fared,
the loved one, in pay for the land he gave me,
First[6] of the Myrgings, my father's home.
Then Ealhhild gave me another ring,
queen of the doughty-band, daughter of Eadwine.[7]

[1] Assyrians.

[2] The "list" has been badly damaged here, so far as symmetry goes, and falls into a curious kind of pedantry.

[3] Here begins what may fairly pass as the oldest and best part of the poem. The reader should note the resemblances of style and phrase here to style and phrase of the *Beowulf*. Kennings are heaped, in variant repetition, for the two kings. The fact that Widsith gave what he had received to his own king should be compared with Beowulf's similar action; the latter gets land in return, the former is paying for land already given.

[4] The heavy gold ring is marked with its value. Spirals of gold, too, were often twisted about the arm; one round broken from the spiral counted so much. So a king's kenning is "ring-breaker."

[5] A favorite kenning for the king is "helmet," or "refuge," or "shelter," or "haven," of his people.

[6] Lord or king.

[7] If persons and places here must be put into some sort of consistent relations both with one another and with the statements of the prologue, Heinzel's scheme is least open to cavil. Widsith leaves his home among the Myrgings, somewhere in the neighborhood of Holstein, and his king,

My laud of her moved through many lands
whenever in song I was urged to say
where under heaven I'd heard of the best
gold-decked queen her gifts dividing.[1]
Then I and Scilling[2] with sounding voice
before our lord uplifted song:
loud to the harp the lay rang out,
and many men of mood sublime
spake with words, — who well could judge, —
that they never had known a nobler song.
Thence I ranged o'er the realm of Goths,
ever seeking the sturdiest clansmen. —
Such was Eormanric's suite of earls:[3]

Eadgils, and sings his way to Italy, where the great Alboin (Ælfwine) gives him welcome, and sends him along with the conqueror's sister, Ealhhild, on the marriage journey to Eormanric. He stays at the Gothic court some time, and gets a splendid gratuity. This, in a kind of anticipatory clause familiar to readers of our old epic, and demanded no doubt by the curiosity of its original hearers, is further described as going to pay Widsith's lord, when the singer got home again, for paternal estates now or previously restored. But another ring is given to Widsith by the new queen, whose praise he has sung and will sing again. Inspired by her, he and Scilling sang wonderfully to the Gothic court, so that the Goths themselves — first and greatest masters of the old minstrel's art, be it remembered — can think of nothing better. — Fiction as it is, this is consistent, so far as it goes. Then follows a description of Eormanric's retinue, a confusion of names, with a touch or so of legend; and Widsith has done. Dr. Lawrence points out that in view of the cross-pattern in Anglo-Saxon poetical style it is not at all certain that Widsith and Scilling are supposed to sing at Eormanric's court. "Our lord" may well be Eadgils, as in v. 94.

[1] See the summary of a queen's duties in a note to the *Beowulf*, v. 622. "Gold-decked," adorned with gold, is the usual adjective for high-born dames.

[2] Müllenhoff, *Runenlehre*, p. 54, makes this name mean "sonorous," — another appellation, like "Widsith" itself, for the *Scop*.

[3] Müllenhoff's arrangement is followed here, so that the names are given as chosen from the list of Eormanric's company, though they are actually

Hethca and Beadeca; [1] Harlings both,
Emerca, Fridla; that East-Goth, too,
sage and brave, the Sire of Unwen; [2]
Secca and Becca, Seafolan and Theodric,
Heathoric and Sifeca, Hlithe and Inggentheow,
Eadwine and Elsa,[3] Ægelmund and Hangar,
and the Neighbor-Myrgings' noble band,
Wulfhere and Wyrmhere, — (war was not languid,
when the Hrethan host with hardy blade
were fain to defend by the forests of Vistula
olden homes from Attila's horde) ! —
Rædhere and Rondhere, Rumstan and Gislhere,
Withergield [4] and Freotheric, Wudga and Hama: [5]
not worst [6] of warrior-comrades these,
though now I come to name them last !
From their host full often whining flew
howling [7] spears at the hostile throng.
Exiles won there woven [8] gold,
men and women, Wudga and Hama.

drawn from various sources and from imagination. The Eormanric saga itself does not come clearly out; in the Norse account, Swanhild, his wife (= Ealhhild, perhaps), is put to death for alleged unfaithfulness. Nothing is hinted here of all that, though among the followers of the famous "troth-breaker" is named Becca, the betrayer Bikki in Norse legend.

[1] These names occur in the mythical genealogy of Essex, and mean "slaughter" and "battle."

[2] The East-Goth is Ostrogotha, who, according to Jordanes, was father of Hunuil, the Unwen of this verse.

[3] Names of Langobard kings.

[4] See *Beowulf*, v. 2051.

[5] Hama, Heime in later German legend, is said in *Beowulf*, v. 1198, to have carried off the famous Brising necklace.

[6] Litotes, as in the *Beowulf*.

[7] "Yelling." See King Heidrek's Riddle on the Arrow: "It flies aloft, yelling aloud." . . .

[8] Twisted, as in rings and the like.

So found I ever, in faring thus,
that he is dearest to dwellers on earth
whom God has raised to rule o'er men
as long as here he lives in the world." [1]

So, faring aye, are fated to wander
men of song through many lands,
to say their need and to speak their thanks.
Or south or north, some one is found,
wise of word and willing of hoard,
to lift his praise in his liegemen's presence,
to honor his earlship, — till all is fled,
light and life together : he gets him laud,
holds under heaven a haughty name.

[1] The words of Widsith are ended, — with a fine bow to the king on whose favor he relies for bread. Even in the epilogue a professional note is evident. Minstrels are the real voice of fame ; treat them accordingly, — as Hamlet advised about the actors. For the results of bad treatment of minstrels, see Uhland's effective little piece, *Des Sängers Fluch.*

INDEX OF NAMES

So far as the characters of the *Beowulf* are concerned, a brief statement of their functions and mutual relations has been made in the Introduction to that poem. For further study of this matter, and of kindred subjects, the reader may be referred to the following books and essays. Müllenhoff, *Beovulf*, Berlin, 1889 (previously published papers collected in one volume); ten Brink, *Beowulf*, Strassburg, 1888; and H. Möller, *Das Beowulfepos*, Kiel, 1883, are full of valuable suggestions, although their main purpose is to prove theories now for the most part set aside. Equally important are the various essays of Sophus Bugge, particularly his *Studien über das Beowulfepos* in Vol. XII of Paul and Braune's *Beiträge*, and of E. Sievers, particularly *Beowulf und Saxo* in the Reports of the Saxon Academy of Sciences, Vol. XLVII. Two articles by F. Klaeber in Vol. III of *Modern Philology* may be named as important for more than one phase of Beowulf criticism. Other essays and books, many of them highly significant in their day, but now absorbed into the main body of information about the epic, — such as Grein's paper on its historic relations, in Vol. IV of Ebert's *Jahrbuch*, — will be found in the excellent bibliography prefixed to Vol. II of Holthausen's edition of *Beowulf*, Heidelberg and New York, 1905, 1906. The text, notes, and glossary of this edition are admirable. A good English edition is that of Wyatt, Cambridge, 1898. The notes to J. R. Clark Hall's prose translation, London, 1901, and to Gering's metrical translation in German, Heidelberg, 1906, have been noted above as valuable for their general information. References to material for study of the other poems, such as W. W. Lawrence's article on *Widsith*, will be found in the several Introductions above. On the general question of epic structure in the *Beowulf*, readers are referred to W. M. Hart's *Ballad and Epic* in the *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, Boston, 1907.

It will be remarked that some of the names in *Widsith* are omitted from this index. Only those are given which are mentioned in the other poems, or belong to the common Germanic legend.

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[1] Ordlaf and Oslaf are probably the same person.

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